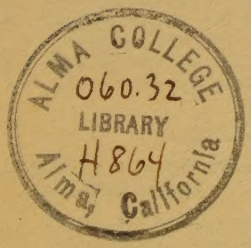
A.M.D.G.

SPIRITUAL WORKS

of

Père Vincent Huby, S.J.

translated from the French
by a
Religious of the Order of S Benedict



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FOREWORD

Recent utterances of the Holy Father concerning the Spiritual Exercises make the publication of a new translation of Père Huby's Retreat not inopportune. First published in 1690, not long before his death, it was the fruit of more than forty years spent largely in the work of giving the Spiritual Exercises to various classes of people. The first Jesuit retreat house in France was established at Vannes, in Lower Brittany, in 1650, with Père Huby as its first Rector; retreats were given regularly at stated times of the year to priests, to laymen and to women; the spiritual fruit obtained from them was incalculable.

Another great work of Père Huby, in which he anticipated Mère Mechtilde, foundress of the Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament, was the establishment, in the Cathedrals of Vannes and Quimper, and many of the surrounding parishes, of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. His life, written within five years of his death, testifies to the universal veneration in which he was held, and to the many favours obtained through his intercession, both before and after his death.

Some of Père Huby's expressions concerning self-surrender and abnegation may startle the ears of our pleasure-loving generation, but in these things he is only the faithful echo of those great doctors of the spiritual life, S Francis de Sales and S John of the Cross. Would that such teaching were more widely accepted in our day!

The present translation has been made from the edition published in Paris in 1772.

PREFACE

Prayer

Enlighten me, Lord, and grant me some understanding of this preface and of the truths on which I am about to meditate. My God, grant that these truths may not only effect an entrance into my mind, but still more into my heart; may they enter so deeply that I may return to you as much gratitude and love as you shall have given me lights and graces. Amen.

In order that these meditations may not meet with minds already full of prejudices which may hinder their fruit, let us first of all clear up a difficulty which often presents itself.

The exercise of divine love, it is said, belongs only to the perfect, to those already far advanced in virtue. Beginners and the imperfect ought first to walk in the purgative way, busying themselves in rooting out their bad habits and mortifying their passions; next they will enter into the illuminative way by the fervent practice of the Christian virtues; finally they will pass into the unitive way, which is that of pure love.

To this we would answer that the imperfect may very profitably apply themselves to the exercise of divine love, making it their occupation and special practice, and that no one has the right to blame either those who take this road to go to God, nor those who counsel them to do so.

1. The Spirit of God is perfectly free in his operations with regard to his creatures: some he leads by fear, others by love; each ought to follow the attraction and breathing of the Holy Spirit.

2. If the way of love were only open to the perfect, who would dare to enter upon it? He who should believe himself to be perfect would cease to be so.

It might perhaps be feared that an imperfect man would fall from humility by opening his heart to love and by exercising himself in the practice of charity. But is it possible that in order to preserve our humility we must separate ourselves from the most noble of all virtues? Are charity and humility incompatible? Let us abase ourselves beneath all created things by humility, let us raise ourselves above everything by charity. Let us empty ourselves of ourselves that we may be filled with God.

3. When God created man he said to him: *My son, give me thy heart.*[1] What God said to man when giving him being he incessantly repeats in preserving in him this same being. On our part, when we are hardly able to lisp we are taught to say morning and evening: *My God, I give you my heart.* Let all to-day say the same thing, both sinners and just. Let us say it morning and evening, day and night; let us say it as often and as heartily as possible.

In a word, God our Creator and our Preserver is essentially our end: we ought therefore to journey towards him, not by bodily footsteps, says S Augustine, but by the affections of our heart. Now of all our affections, no other travels so directly and so immediately towards God as love. The mind draws to itself, so to speak, the object of its thoughts. The heart, borne on the wings of love, flies directly towards the object of its love. Divine love is then the end towards which all men should tend, perfect and imperfect, sinners and the just; love is the end and object, not only of this life, but also of the next, the end alike of time and of eternity.

When we love God, we are happy, whatever may be our situation or our circumstances. And the more

[1] Prov. xxiii, 26.

we love him, the greater will be our happiness; consequently, when in heaven we shall see him clearly and love him perfectly, we shall have attained perfect happiness. This is the sense in which we should understand those words of the catechism, "*Man is created to love God in this world, and to be happy in the next.*" That is, man was created to love God both in this world and in the other, and to find in this love his true happiness, whether that which belongs to his condition as pilgrim in this life, or that which is proper to the state of glory.

Besides, divine love is not only the end of our creation and preservation, it is the end also of the mysteries of the life of our Saviour. Why did the Eternal Word take a human nature and come to share our life here below? Only that man might love him more easily and in a more homely fashion. Why did he dwell so long with us and amongst us? Only that he might enkindle in all hearts the fire of his love. *I am come to cast fire upon the earth.*[1] Why did he die upon a cross? That those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them.[2] Why has he made himself our food in the mystery of the Eucharist? To give us fire to eat and drink in his body and his blood.[3] Why did the Holy Ghost descend upon the earth on the day of Pentecost? The symbol of fire under which he hid himself shews plainly that he desired to enkindle and burn our hearts with the flames of divine love. If then all men desired to enter into the designs of God, their Creator and the Author of their faith, they would unceasingly employ all their energies and powers in gaining and increasing in their hearts this holy love.

4. The first and greatest of all God's commandments is that of his love. On whom is this precept binding? On all men without exception, old and young, imperfect and perfect, sinners and the just.

[1] Lk. xii, 49. [2] 2 Cor. v, 15. [3] S Ephrem.

For they are all obliged to love God, and to love him with all their heart and with all their strength. The same God who has commanded us to love him gives us also the grace which enables us to fulfil it. God demands of us our whole heart and our whole strength, and he gives us the grace to consecrate to him our whole heart and our whole mind, that we may be a perfect holocaust of love.

Everyone, without exception, *ought* to love God, because he has commanded it; everyone *can* love God, since he has given them grace to do so. Shall we then revolt against his command, be faithless to His grace? No, let us rather devote ourselves, whether we are just or sinners, perfect or imperfect, let us bend all our energies from this time forward, at all times and in all places, to loving God as we both can, and ought to love Him.

5. But sinners and the imperfect are hindered by vices, sins and passions. I agree. But, I beg of you, tell me what other means is there as prompt and as efficacious as divine love to wash out sins, destroy vices and passions, and to form in us all the virtues?

But first, let us see whether sins ought to be a hindrance. For what is contrition? Is it not sorrow which has its rise in divine love? Love which is penitent, sad, and afflicted at having offended a Father? The more the love of God reigns in a heart, the more is it broken by sorrow, and the more surely and abundantly are its sins forgiven. For this reason did Magdalen receive pardon for her sins which were many and grievous; he alone knew to what extent he remitted the temporal punishment due to her disorderly life, for he alone knew the extent of her love. If less has been granted to others, it is because they loved less.[1] This contrition, produced by charity and joined with the desire of the sacrament, purifies

[1] Lk. vii, 17.

and sanctifies the sinner even before the actual reception of the sacrament. Happy is he whose sorrow emanates from and is caused by the ardour of charity! Its purifying flames are able in one moment to change the sinner into a just man, raising him from an abyss of sin to the happy state of a child of God; and even, if his love is fervent enough, they may be called a second baptism.

Moreover, this charity is an all-consuming fire which burns and destroys promptly and efficaciously every vice. The other virtues only attack those which are opposed to them: humility will only destroy pride; patience destroys impatience: but charity destroys all the vices. Does not S Paul say to the Corinthians: Charity is neither proud nor ambitious nor envious; she never seeks her own interest, she is not roused to anger, suspects no evil, rejoices not in iniquity?[1] Undoubtedly, the root of every vice is self-love, which is the source of the three principal concupiscences, the triple chain by which we are fastened so inextricably to the desire of all those things which are honourable, useful and agreeable to our lower nature. But tell me, what can more promptly and efficaciously uproot this self-love than the love of God?

One love is thus cured by another, self-love by divine love, love of self by the love of Jesus. What was the soul-sickness of Magdalen? Was it not self-love, love of pleasure and of sensual delights? And what was the remedy? The love of our Lord Jesus Christ. The malady afflicting S Augustine was love of the world, of a false glory and the satisfaction of the senses; his remedy was the love of God. This idea has been well expressed by artists who have depicted the Saint with a burning heart in his hand.

Let us add that this divine love supersedes in our hearts that vicious love which our corrupt nature

[1] I Cor. xiii, 4, 5, 6.

feels for all that flatters us, by substituting a Christian hatred of ourselves. The more we love God, the more deep will be this holy hatred, which our Saviour recommends so earnestly, and which is so necessary for us that without it we cannot be his disciples.

Whence comes, for example, that self-abhorrence which in all ages perfect penitents have conceived against themselves? Whence come those pitiless mortifications which they have imposed on their lower nature? Doubtless from divine love. The lover cannot contemplate the outrages which he has committed against his Beloved without hating himself, rousing himself to anger against himself: he makes it his business to avenge the wrongs of the God he has offended; he punishes himself, chastises himself severely, to satisfy for the injury he has done to his God.

The soul thus washed and cleansed from the defilement of its sins is healed of its sickness, that is to say, delivered from the tyranny of its passions; it only remains to adorn and beautify it with virtues worthy of Jesus Christ its Head. What will bring about this last wonder? Again it will be the love of God, for charity is meek, it is patience itself, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, suffers all things.

Although each virtue has its own motive, peculiar to itself and distinct from charity, yet charity takes all kinds of shapes: by an admirable fertility, it brings forth all the other virtues; and because it produces all their several operations, it takes also all their names. When it detaches the heart from all that is created and visible, it is called *temperance;* determined to suffer everything, it is called *fortitude;* it takes the name of *justice*, when, seeing God in all its fellow-men, it renders to each his due.

What wonderful effects has not love produced in Old Testament times, and still more under the new

dispensation. Ever since the day when the Holy Spirit enkindled this divine fire in the hearts of the Apostles, the disciples, and so many others, both just and sinners, what wonderful changes, what conversions have we not seen! How many Martyrs, how many Saints of both sexes! What admirable fruits of eminent and heroic virtue have been and are still being produced on our earth, watered and cultivated by the Holy Spirit, who pours out his love into our hearts!

Do you desire to attain quickly and easily to perfection? Then love. For perfection consists in detachment from ourselves and union with God. Fear and hope, although very estimable in themselves, look with one eye only on God, while the other is fixed on our own interests; they do not therefore entirely separate and detach us from ourselves. Love alone teaches us to forget ourselves, to think only of God, to renounce our own interests in order to seek and desire none but those of God and his glory, for time and eternity.

As habitual charity is the rule and measure of our sanctity and perfection here below, it will also be the rule and measure of our glory and happiness in heaven. The more we have loved God on earth, the more we shall love and be loved by Him in the next world, the more we shall rejoice in him and in all that concerns him.

The knowledge of a God worthy of an infinite love, yet loved with an affection so limited, enkindles in the Blessed an insatiable longing to love him more perfectly, and to burn with the flames of a love ever increasing, ever new and ever more ardent: yet their desires are ineffective. But what they cannot do, we can perform. Every day, every instant, we can if only we so will, add to our love fresh growth, continual increase. For every new degree of love which we now acquire, there will be a corresponding increase in eternity both of love for God in our hearts,

and ever greater love for us on God's part. Oh! what power such a motive has over the heart of one who fully realises its meaning! How efficacious it is, both to empty us of ourselves and to substitute in our hearts love in place of any other motive, and thus make us devote ourselves entirely and continually to the exercise of divine love.

From all these considerations we may easily see that the love of God is in a certain sense the "one thing necessary"[1] for all men alike, perfect or imperfect, just and sinners; it is at least that "better part" which it is in their power to choose.

Love is our goal, in time and in eternity; it is love that God demands when he asks for our heart: it is his first and great commandment. Love obtains for us promptly and abundantly the pardon of all our sins, and enriches our souls with every virtue. Shall we not then, all of us, and as perfectly as possible, apply ourselves to the acquisition of this precious treasure? To help ourselves in this quest, with the aid of God's grace, is the purpose we should have in view in using these meditations.

In order to put this goal before yourselves in a clearer light, and to help you to enter seriously upon the practice of this "one thing necessary," meditate and probe as deeply as you can into the meaning of this short word, UNITY.

(i) UNITY of love. Our heart must be suffered to contain but one only and unique love, and we must be ready to say with S Francis de Sales: "If I recognised in myself the least fibre of love which was not entirely for God, I would tear it out immediately." By means of this practice, which excludes all other loves, we love nothing out of God, nothing save in God and for God: there is no room then in our soul for any love that is not pure, without admixture of anything lower; it is a sovereign love; for our heart, freed from all other affections, uses

[1] Lk. x. 42.

all its powers to rise towards God, and God, on his side, fills it so much the more liberally with himself as there is now nothing that can hinder the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This unity of love ought to be constant and invariable. By means of it we shall put an end to those vagaries, those shameful alternations by which our inconstant heart, after beginning to walk in the way of pure love, is always looking back: by it our heart will receive a new vigour, which will strengthen and animate it to run more steadfastly: by it our life will become little else than one perpetual exercise of actual love.

(ii) UNITY of esteem, for *who is like to God?* Or what is comparable to the sweet attractions of His love? One act of divine love is more precious than the entire world, than all the other operations of divine grace. Love is the life of eternity; it is the life of the blessed in heaven, of the angels, of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, of God himself.

(iii) UNITY of principle, for love ought to be the soul of our soul, the life of our life. It ought so perfectly to establish the reign of God within us that we can say with S Paul: I live now no longer, but God and Jesus Christ alone live in me.

(iv) UNITY of aim, for when love has become the sole motive of all our movements, exterior as well as interior, it will also be their only end. To love, and to draw the whole world to love, this should be the only aim, the only desire of the true lover of God.

(v) UNITY in the interior powers of our soul, for when love occupies and fills the memory, the mind and the will, it easily employs them in fulfilling its designs.

(vi) UNITY in our exterior senses, using our eyes, our ears, and our tongue only to maintain and increase our own love and that of others.

This life of UNITY puts a man in possession of all that is most precious, most honourable and most

pleasing to God, as well as all that is most honourable, just, easy, useful and necessary to us.

(i) All that is most *honourable;* for what can be greater than to love God? Love, in the language of the philosophers, and even in that of the Holy Spirit, transforms, so to speak, the man into the object of his love. Do you love the earth? Then are you earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? continues S Augustine, you are God. He who cares for nothing but God, says S Bonaventure, is filled with God, is entirely in God, is clothed with God. What elevation, what glory is comparable with this?

(ii) All that is most *just;* for to love a God infinitely good, infinitely lovable, to love our Creator, our Redeemer, our Benefactor, from whom we have received all we possess, all we are, was there ever a law of greater and more indispensable justice?

(iii) On God's side, it is most *easy*, for his infinite perfections merit an infinite love; it is easy to our will, which was no less created to love than the sun was to shine; it is easy by reason of divine grace, which God never ceases to give me in order that I may love him.

(iv) All that is most *useful*, even infinitely useful, for he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in return dwells in him. All the true goods of time and eternity come to us together with charity; the friendship of God, his fatherly protection, the witness of a good conscience, that peace which the world cannot give, and a right to the kingdom of God and eternal happiness with him. A heart which loves as it ought to love will feel the truth of what I say, and will understand how charity ought to be preferred to everything else, especially to all the useless things with which we encumber ourselves.

(v) Lastly, all that is most *necessary*. Let a man unite in his own person wit, knowledge, great talents; let him be raised to a throne; let him speak with the tongue of angels; let him be endowed with the gift

of miracles; let him possess everything except charity: he is yet infinitely poor and miserable, for, says S Augustine, he has lost the sovereign good: the shameful slave of sin and Satan, he is no longer the friend of God. On the other hand, let a man be devoid of talent, poor and friendless; let him be despised and overwhelmed with misery and sorrow; if he only has charity in his heart, how rich he is, how happy. Even here below he possesses no less a good than God himself, and he will possess him eternally in heaven if he dies in the state of charity. May this divine love, this precious gift upon which depends the possession of God and our eternal happiness, be firmly rooted in all hearts, and continue to grow increasingly until we draw our last breath. Amen.

PRAYER.

Jesus Christ, my God and my Saviour, I am taught by the light of your grace that the best use which I can make of my life is to live for your love and by your love. That is what you chiefly ask and expect from me. I also desire, by the help of your grace, to employ my whole mind, my whole heart, all my energies in loving you, every moment of my life. To love you, my God and my Saviour, to love you and to make you loved, this is my only desire, my only wish, for time and eternity. Amen.

RETREAT

on the Love of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ

FIRST DAY.

First Meditation.

On the End of Man.

Prayer.

My God, the end for which you have created me and preserved my life, becomes for me, by an indispensable law, that to which I ought to tend, and direct my whole being. This end, the only end worthy of you, is yourself, the happiness of serving and loving you. Therefore, I only live and I only breathe for you. What a blessed and glorious destiny is this!

But alas, how often, instead of loving you, you, my God and my Creator, have I loved vanity and falsehood! How often, instead of loving you, I have only offended you! What wretchedness and misery!

For all this I humbly implore your pardon, my God, and I entreat your infinite mercy that this very moment may see the end of so monstrous a disorder and the beginning of a new life which shall be in keeping with my true destiny. By the help of your grace I desire from this moment to begin to love you and to serve you in the manner and degree which you expect of me.

I Point.

I ought to love God, because he has created me.

Whence do I come? Who is the author of my being? This knowledge is of great importance, I cannot neglect it without denying the rights of reason and religion: to acquire it is the most essential of all my duties. The voice of nature itself cries out to me that I owe to the author of my being submission, respect, gratitude and love. The very needs of my being, its liability to change and decay, force me to own that I had a beginning, and that my end is not far off. My life will soon be finished, and it certainly had a commencement: someone then must have given it me.

Could I have given myself being, and thus become my own first principle? No, that is evidently impossible; before I had being, I was nothing; and that which is nothing, can do nothing.

Perhaps I owe my being to those who were the immediate instruments of my existence? A moment's reflection will dissipate any such notion. This immaterial soul, this spiritual, eternal, immortal soul, this soul which distinguishes me from other animals and makes me almost equal to the angels, could only have been the work of God alone.

Still more, that which is mutable and dependent, cannot subsist by right of its own being: yet there is nothing more subject to dependence and change than the matter of which my body is composed. So it must have been created, and creation supposes an infinite Power: I must therefore seek in God himself the first principle of even the most vile portion of myself. Lastly, the wonderful play of muscles, joints, and all those things which form the admirable mechanism of our bodies, is far beyond the knowledge of our fathers and mothers; they are not, then, they never could be the first authors either of my

body or my soul, nor of the arrangement of all their parts. Who can then be ignorant that it is none other than you, and you alone, my God, that by your almighty word created this vast universe and all the creatures of whom it is composed? My soul, the most noble portion of my being, is a breath from your mouth; your hands, with admirable skill, formed, arranged, and bound the members of my body together in my mother's womb.

Adorable source of my being, glorious indeed is it for me to have had none other than you for the author of my being and to be able with truth to call you my Creator and my Father. But how shameful it is for so powerful a Master to have in me so unruly a servant, that I should be so ungrateful a son to so good a Father! What an outrage that what comes from you should not return to you, but should be employed against you! My God, forgive me; forgive me, my God! Filled with gratitude, the being which I received from you I should have employed to serve and love you. But alas, what shame and confusion are due to me for the use I have actually made of it? I blush for the past, and I determine that from this moment I will begin to do what I ought already to have spent every moment of my life in doing. I love you, I bless you, I thank you with all the energies of my being. Yes, my God, from heart and soul I declare it, I am yours, wholly yours.

I can only belong to one master, and I only desire one. Let every creature be banished from my mind, let them depart from my heart. Begone, vain and deceitful creatures; I will love none but my Creator, my God, the sole author of my being; all my powers shall be occupied with him alone. When I think of the greatness of my destiny, the nobility of my origin, I am ashamed to think how far short I fall of all that I ought to be. Born of God, formed to his image, I ought to realize that he alone is worthy to be the object of all my thoughts and desires, the end of

my being. Since you have deigned to create me, my God, you will not disdain to receive me, now that I desire to return sincerely to you.

II Point.

I ought to love God because it was love that induced him to create me.

God, the sole author of my being, is infinitely wise; consequently, some reason must have determined him to cast his eyes upon me from all eternity, and in due time to execute his eternal designs.

What was this reason? Was there anything wanting to God? Evidently not; he is the plenitude of all possible good, the source of true happiness. Could God have been influenced by my prayers, by the desires of any other creature? Again, no; when God thought of me, nothing yet existed, all was a great void.

It is in yourself, then, my God, that I must find the reason which it is useless to search for elsewhere. What a powerful advocate I have in your presence, an advocate who pleads most insistently in my favour, I mean the love of your heart for me. If this love had not solicited you on behalf of your creatures, never would your power have drawn them out of nothing. Love divine, source of all the good I have ever received; love enkindled from all eternity in the heart of my Father; Love perfectly disinterested, which saw in me nothing but my nothingness, my infidelities and my sins! how lovable you are, and how greatly are you loved by those whom truth has enlightened! I feel that I do love you, still more do I feel that I love you very imperfectly. Divine love! Take upon yourself to pay my debt of gratitude to God; make good the insufficiency of my love.

Yet again. This love which has spoken on my behalf to the heart of God, has kept silent in regard of an

infinity of possible creatures, whom God will never draw out of their nothingness. For God has loved me alone more than an infinity of worlds, an infinity of men and of angels, whom he could have drawn out of the abyss of eternal not-being had he so chosen. Yet among this multitude of men and angels whom he might have created but did not, how many faithful servants, how many true hearts, hearts all for him, may he not have seen!

But God did not cast his loving eyes upon any of them; he chose me, this miserable creature, this ungrateful heart, this sinner deserving hell. This thought ought often to occupy my mind, and the more it does so, the more will it fill me with astonishment, the more will it grip my heart. Compelled by gratitude I shall often cry out: What power has love had over the heart of God! How generous has he not been to me!

What has been hitherto the degree of my love for you, my God, for you who have loved me with an eternal love, a love of unspeakable tenderness, a love of preference? It is for me to answer this question. Alas! my conscience pronounces against me a sentence which confounds and condemns me. To have been loved by God, and to have loved him so little in return; never to have truly loved him; to have often and perhaps even grievously offended him! Is not my wicked and ungrateful heart worthy of hatred and detestation?

The preference which God has shewn me over so many men and angels whom he has left in the order of possible creations, is a proof of his love for me. The preference which I give him to-day in my heart over all creatures, shall be the proof of my love for him. But alas! the preference which I swear to give him now for all the rest of my life is quite insufficient to repay that with which he has honoured me. Grant me, my God, so abundant a grace, so perfect a correspondence with your holy will, that by the

ardour of my love I may be able to supply for all that you would have received from all the creatures to whom you have preferred me.

III Point.

I ought to love God because he created me to love him.

What was God's purpose in creating me? What does his love expect from me? Can I be ignorant of this, or refuse his just demands, though it should cost me a thousand lives? Love longs to be loved; it only asks, only desires, a return of love. And what can be more just or more necessary than that creatures should love a God who has first loved them?

It is therefore in order that I should love him that God has given me a heart capable of loving; it is for this alone that I live and breathe. Love was the cause and the principle of my being; it is also its last end. But have I loved this divine love, have I loved the God of love? I have scarcely thought about it. He has loved me, but I have loved him little, or not at all. Nothing but love for me on God's part, nothing but coldness, ingratitude and rebellion on mine! Is not this the greatest of disorders?

But what remains for me to do now? By sorrow alone can I make any reparation for the past. If my heart has been hitherto closed against the love of my God, it must now be opened by regret, and most bitter regret, for not having loved him. Sorrow, confusion, regret, let your sword pierce this heart which has been so long impenetrable to love. I have been able to live without loving, would that now I might die of shame and sorrow. Henceforth the love of my God must receive a faithful return. That love which has pleaded for me to the heart of God retains all its original strength; so many offences, so many infidelities have never been able to quench it. God loves me; God asks for my love; what is my heart going to give in return?

Indeed, dear Lord, if I am not deceived, my heart

replies that it does love you. Yes, my God, I do love you, yes, I do love you.

But in order that my response may be sincere, and that the dispositions of my heart should be pleasing to God, it is not with my mouth but by my deeds that I must love him. To love and serve God, this is the end for which I was created; to this will I henceforward devote myself. To love and serve God from this very moment and without delay, continually and without interruption, constantly and without wavering, this shall be my occupation and employment for the rest of my life.

PRAYER.

God, who hast created me, and hast created me through love, grant me grace to fulfil my glorious destiny: make my love ardent, generous, worthy of you; may I love you, serve you as you desire, as my duty demands, this is the earnest petition of my heart.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the benefit of preservation.

PRAYER.

God almighty, you have not only created me, you have also preserved me, and you still preserve me in order that I may love and serve you. This new benefit is for me a new obligation to tend sincerely and with all my might towards the end for which I have been created and preserved; yet, ungrateful as I am, by an abuse of this double benefit, how often have I turned away from my end! Forgive me, my God. Let your love continue its work of preserving my life, let not your graces cease to flow upon me, so that I may now begin once for all, and may continue till death and beyond, to love and serve you. Amen.

I POINT.

God preserves me.

If God, by a continuous act of creation, had not

preserved the life which he has given me, the first moment of my existence would also have been the last. But God would not let the work of his hands perish thus. From all eternity love determined to give me being; in time, love preserves me; it preserves me in preference to so many others who have never come into existence; it preserves me in spite of my sins, each of which deserves death.

Every moment of my life is then, on God's part, a fresh proof of his love for me and a new motive for loving him more ardently: shall not every moment, on my part, produce a lively feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving: shall not these be accompanied by regret and sorrow for having lost so many precious moments? You gave me these moments, my God, that I might love and serve you; to what use have I put them save vanity, falsehood and sin? Alas, my soul, is it possible that with the most detestable ingratitude you have employed against God his very gifts? How has God so long endured such disorder, such a crying injustice? There is no difficulty in discovering the motive of this admirable patience, so full of love; its sole purpose in preserving me for so long a time in spite of my infidelity was to lead me to penance and to recall me to my duty. By your grace, Lord, I will co-operate in your loving designs. In reparation for the past I offer you a humbled and contrite heart: for the future, I offer you every moment of a life whose every moment I receive from you, and which I receive only in order to serve and love you.

II Point.

God preserves for my use and for my needs an infinite number of other creatures.

God preserves my life; but would this be a gift or a punishment if he did not preserve also the creatures who surround and assist me? The sun to give me light; the earth to uphold me; the air, which refreshes

me; food for my nourishment; clothing to cover me, and an infinity of other creatures who are necessary to me, or at least useful, both in health and in sickness. Whence come all these helps? Who has provided so liberally, I will not say for my needs only, but even for my pleasure? It is the love of my God; it is he who has brought to my service the omnipotence which built up the universe, the profuse liberality which filled it with gifts. What multitude, what diversity in the creatures on the earth, in the waters, in the air. Love could not endure that anything should be wanting, nor was anything too costly when it was a question of my well-being. I say *my* well-being, for it is evident that God did not construct the universe for his own use and needs. His infinite plenitude excludes all need; he is perfectly happy in himself and by himself. Evidently also, he did not form this visible and material world for the angels: they are pure spirits, and could have no need of sensible creatures. Man is unquestionably the centre towards which radiate all the parts of this admirable machine; all those things which he sees with his eyes, hears with his ears, etc. So it is for man, so it is for *me* that God has created and preserved the heavens and the earth, and all that they contain.

Omnipotence of God, I adore you. Astonished beyond measure, I hear your word of command in that void whence you have drawn all material things, bringing out of the abyss successively the sun and the stars, the sea and the earth: all these have obeyed your voice, shall I alone rebel? Do not the deaf and senseless beings whom you have commanded to minister to me confound me by the example of their obedience? In language mute yet intelligible, they cry out unceasingly: "Look above us for him who has made us for your service; he is your Creator and your Preserver as he is ours." Why cannot I, my omnipotent Lord, produce as many acts of submission and gratitude as there are

creatures in the universe who serve me by an inviolable submission to your orders?

But what shall I return to you, divine Love, what shall I return to you, first of all for myself? By my preservation you have given me to myself at every moment of my life. What shall I return you for this innumerable multitude of creatures through whom you unceasingly overwhelm me with benefits? I bless you, I love you, and I will love you every moment of my existence. This is but little in payment of my debt, or to satisfy the ardour of my love; I will then make my own and I will offer to you unceasingly all the love for you that can be found in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory.

III Point.

God preserves me by means of all the creatures he preserves for my use.

Is it not a great matter for rejoicing and gratitude that God should preserve all these creatures, and employ them continually in my service? But that God himself labours unceasingly, so to speak, in them and through them, for me, is not this an unspeakable, incomprehensible miracle of love?

Yes, it is indeed God who makes the sun to rise over our heads, who arranges the seasons, who prepares and pours out rain upon the earth; it is he who gives to man and beast the nourishment proper to each; to him do the infants cry at the breast, and the young birds in the nest. In a word, all creatures are but the instruments of that Providence which watches over us with such care, that not one hair falls from our heads without his knowledge;[1] with such assiduity that even while I sleep, he is watching to defend me; with such affection that his love causes him a kind of disquietude. *The Lord is careful for me.*[2]

[1] "A hair of your head shall not perish." Lk. xxi, 18.
[2] Ps. xxxix, 18.

Have I ever seriously considered these things before? And now that I do so, what shall I say? I shall say and I confess that I have been a fool satisfied with husks, whose mind has been content to penetrate no further than my eyes could see; that I have been mad, not understanding that all the beauties, all the properties of creatures come from you, my God, and that your hand keeps them all in their various functions; lastly, that I am utterly ungrateful. Unceasingly have I received your gifts, without ever raising my mind and heart to the source from which they flow: pardon me all my stupidity and my ingratitude.

Now that I see you clearly, working and labouring in and by means of everything in the world, what ought not I to do for you? If only I could in my turn employ the whole world for you and for your glory! I can, and I will, by uniting my voice incessantly to that of heaven and earth, which sings your praises and announces your glory: I will see you, I will bless you, I will adore you and I will love you in all things.

In order to love you as your goodness towards me has deserved, I ought to possess the hearts of all creatures, or else a heart capable of as much love as all these together could contain. I would consecrate to you all these hearts, all this love. Receive, my God, these my desires, for alas, I can only give you one heart, and that a very narrow one, very limited in its possibilities of loving.

Prayer.

Father of mercies, expand, by your grace, the capacity of my heart; fill it with your love: hearken to my desires; it is you who have inspired them.

SECOND DAY

FIRST MEDITATION, *on these words*:

My son, give me thy heart (Prov. xxiii, 26).

PRAYER.

How greatly do you honour me, my God, by asking for my heart. What you ask is what I desire above all things to give you; yet in order to do so, I have need of your grace. In my turn, I implore you to give it me. No, Lord, you will not refuse me; the request which you have condescended to make is an assured pledge of this: for my part, I will give you my heart, and with it all that I am, all that I can do, all that I have. Amen.

I POINT.

God asks me for my heart.

It is only right and just that the necessity of the creature should have recourse by prayer to the fulness of God; that in its poverty, it should address itself to God, who is infinitely rich. But that a God to whom belongs the whole world with all the abundance of its riches; that a God who had declared by the mouth of David that he has no need of our goods, should ask something from his creature, and should even abase himself so far as to entreat, what a prodigy is this, what an honour for the creature! Yet it is true that God cherishes in his heart a desire for something that we have in us, and this desire of God is so burning that he cannot contain it in himself. *My son*, he says to each of us, I desire passionately a portion of yourself; I could take it from you, but it would lose all its beauty in my eyes if you did not give it to me yourself; I want to receive it as a free gift from your hands; will you refuse me what I ask, you whom I have loved with an eternal love, you who owe me all you are?

Is it possible, my God, that I should have something in my possession, and that when you ask me for it, I should refuse you? No, Lord, speak but the word, your servant heareth. My body, my soul, the blood in my veins, all is yours by right of creation and preservation, all is yours also by the offering which I make of it.

My son, continues God, give me your love, give me your heart. If you refuse it, I shall be angry, if you divide it, I shall be jealous. How wonderful this is! A God, whose entreaties I have a hundred times, a thousand times, refused, returns once more, and again demands my heart. And what a heart! Ungrateful, treacherous, rebellious; soiled by so many unworthy affections, so many sins; so long obdurate and resisting. And for what has it so long held back? For trifles, worthless things, while all the time nothing but yourself, my God, could satisfy it. You alone are capable of such long-enduring love. But to-day, at long last, I will return to my duty; you ask this of me, and I implore you to accept it. I give you my heart, but a heart contrite and humbled at the sight of so much resistance.

When I say I give my heart to God, do I well understand the extent of what I am promising? In asking me for it, God asks everything: he reckons that in possessing that, he will possess all: for all my powers are subject to the law and dominion of my heart. Yes, Lord, I do understand what you ask in demanding my heart; it is with full knowledge that I now ratify the donation I have made.

Does my heart agree with my lips, or am I deluding myself with empty phrases? It is so easy to give to God everything in general and with our mouth; but it is most difficult to give it him in detail and in practice. Am I ready to renounce my own convenience, to suffer the effects of poverty? Am I free from all attachment to health, life and reputation, am I ready to suffer with resignation sickness, death

and contempt? Do I mean to give all my time to God, only wishing to use it in doing what he wants of me? etc.

Let each one here, in good earnest, examine and probe his heart, and say to God sincerely: In giving you my heart, I place in your hands and abandon to your good providence my interests, health, honour, convenience, time, life, all.

II Point.

God asks for my whole heart.

I have, then, given everything, abandoned everything to God; but have I done it with my whole heart? It is not the gift in itself, nor the hand which offers it, that God considers; it is upon the heart itself that he fixes his eyes. The disposition, the love of the heart, this is what gives or takes away the value of all one does for God, of all one gives him. Is not this a consoling thought for a wretched creature like myself? For I can neither do much, nor great things for God; but the little he asks, I can do with all my heart, and with great affection. My God, you are such a kind Master; happy those who have left all to be entirely yours. Without leaving the state of life in which you have placed me, I can, by fulfilling my daily duties, merit for myself and glorify God as much as those who bear the burthen and heat of the day. Nothing is wanting but to give my whole heart to God. And does he not deserve it? With whom else should I divide it?

But alas! is it to give oneself to God with all our love, all our affection, all our heart, if we still keep our self-love, if we still seek ourselves in anything, if we lend ourselves readily to low views and imperfect motives?

Is it giving to God our whole heart if we still sadden the Holy Spirit by resistance to grace, by sin,

however slight? When I pray so negligently, when I work so lazily, have I given to God what he asks, what he deserves, all my affection, all my heart?

Behold, my God, how I have lived till now. But I renounce this life, and with all my heart. Pure love, perfect love, enkindle your ardours in my soul. Pure love, destroy in me all self-love and self-seeking, and suffer no other love to mingle with yours. Perfect love, possess all the powers of my soul; rouse up my negligence, warm my tepidity, sustain me against the weight of sin that I carry in myself. Alas, my God, what kind of existence do we lead in this valley of tears, where the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and where one cannot long live without some spot or stain of sin?

III Point.

God asks my whole heart for ever.

God does not say to us: Lend me your heart, but he says: *My son, give me thy heart.*

What I have simply lent, is still my own, I count it in the number of my belongings: I have only given the use of it to someone else, for a longer or shorter time; when that time has elapsed, I have the right to take it back. On the contrary, what I have given, no longer belongs to me; it has passed for ever into the power of another; without doing him an injury, without a manifest theft, I cannot take it from him.

Many Christians are content with lending their heart to God. What fervour do they not shew in prayer, what cowards they are when it comes to action! All for God at Holy Communion, all for themselves in daily life! What beautiful plans and resolutions made during a retreat, but how are they put into execution? They will be new men whenever

they go to confession, but their conduct never changes. Constantly receiving and as often rejecting grace, promising to amend and yet going on in the old sins. And while I seem to speak of others, it is myself that I am describing, dear Lord.

But when all is said and done, to whom does my heart really belong? Is it to God? Is it to myself? No, I am not my own, says the great Apostle. I am the property, the inheritance, the possession of God, say the prophets. God cannot renounce the essential dominion which he has over my heart; it is his, all his, always his. When he lent me to myself, he fixed and determined the use which I was to make of his property. I have not then the right to rob him for one moment of my life, of my love and my heart, for it is to rob him of something which he asks of me, and which belongs essentially to him.

You know better than I do, my God, the depths of instability, corruption, and frivolity which original sin has implanted in my heart; bad as it is, it is yet your property, your patrimony. I place it in your hands; keep it yourself, but keep it so securely that it shall shew no inconstancy, no reserve in your regard, but may be, as you desire, and as I hope it will by your grace, all yours for all eternity.

Prayer.

No, my God, my heart is no longer my own, it is yours. Since you have asked me to give it you, you cannot refuse it. I give it, and you accept it. Look upon it as a thing consecrated to you; fill it with your graces; keep it so carefully that nothing shall ever be able to take it from you again, that nothing shall interrupt even for a moment that continual love which I desire to have for you.

Second Meditation.

On the Commandment of loving God.

Prayer.

It is your absolute will that I should love you, my God, for you have expressly commanded me to do so. What a consolation, what a joy this is for me! You know well that I can do nothing without you; and since you are a God of justice, you cannot command me anything impossible. You will therefore prepare my heart, you offer me your grace that I may accomplish your precept. In spite of my unworthiness, give me, I beseech you, such powerful graces that I may indeed love you as you have commanded, with all my heart, with all my mind, and with all my strength. Amen.

I Point.

God has commanded me to love him.

The being which God has given us, the innumerable goods which his liberality has so abundantly provided in creation, and which he constantly preserves for our use, all these assuredly merit that we should love that divine love which is the sole source of so many benefits.

The honour which God has done us in asking for our heart, the jealousy he feels when we do not respond whole-heartedly to this demand, should penetrate and captivate a heart capable of love. However, God is not content with making these advances; He speaks as a master, he commands, threatens, and terrifies. If he had only commanded us to fear his rigorous justice, to respect his infinite majesty, to subject ourselves to his absolute and universal domination, there would be nothing in all this which

could astonish or surprise my reason: but when God who is infinitely great in power, majesty and every kind of perfection, commands an earthworm to love him, this injunction is almost as astonishing as it is adorable. It is a command which comes forth from the heart of God, shewing me its very nature, revealing the immense *love* which he has of *my love*. He only employs so many means, he only takes so many measures to make himself loved, in order to satisfy his ardent desire of possessing my whole heart.

Is not this commandment my greatest glory? While the kings of the earth despise my heart, the King of heaven does not only permit, but he commands me to enter into a relationship of love with him; he is angry if I do not love him; and the more often my heart and my mouth repeat these words, *I love you, God of my heart*, the more tenderly does this sovereign monarch cherish me.

This commandment is greatly to my advantage. For the love of God is the only real treasure of the soul: it is the source of all its happiness, the remedy for all its ills.

It is, again, most easy and most agreeable. What human being does not possess a heart capable of loving a father, a benefactor, a master who desires to be also our friend? Far from it costing me anything to love, there is no emotion of my heart which is so delightful, so enjoyable as love. I speak of pure and chaste love, a love of which God himself is both source and object. For if a heart were insensible to motives so stirring, if it would not obey a commandment at once so easy, so useful, so glorious, and so full of the sweetest delights, would it be indeed a human heart? No, it could not be made of flesh and blood, it could only be the heart of a devil.

Yes, Lord, hell itself could not be sufficient punishment for such a monster: justice would demand that a thousand fires should burn for all eternity a heart

which in time would not burn with the fire of your divine love.

II Point.

God also ordains the manner in which he wills to be loved.

God has not only commanded me to love him, but also to love him with all my heart and with all my strength.

Your commandments, O Lord, are more to be desired than gold or many precious stones; and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.[1] You command me to love you much because you love me so much; you command me to love you with all my heart and all my strength, because you love me with all your heart, and, if I may so speak, with all your strength. He who loves little is content with a slight return of love.

But alas, what have I done in the past? My tongue has often protested that I love God with all my heart, but was this the real truth? Have I been honest with God in so saying? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, out of the same abundance the mind thinks, the hand acts, the feet walk, and the body and the soul are moved. If then my heart had been full of love for God, this would have been manifest in my thoughts, my actions, my speech and my plans; all would have been sanctified and deified by love. I have great reason to fear that hitherto I have not loved God with all the fullness of my heart.

But what I have by no means done so far, I must now begin to do; at the present moment God commands me to love him with all my heart and all my energies; he gives me at the present moment enough grace to fulfil his precept. I am as certain of

[1] Ps. xviii, 11.

his help as of his commandment. This is the plain truth, I cannot deny it, and I will begin this very minute. This fidelity will bring down fresh grace; on my own part a new degree of correspondence, followed by new grace on the part of God: this again drawing ever stronger love from me, always receiving, always loving, this is how I desire henceforth to live. Since I have wasted so many graces in the past, I hope for the future to receive none without fruit. Because I have lost for ever so many moments when I did not love my God, the rest of my life shall be a life filled with love. Could there be any occupation more glorious or more to my advantage?

You only despise, Lord, the hearts of the reprobate, who have refused to love you, and now have it no longer in their power to do so. I have deserved their fate; your love has preserved me from it, and in preserving my life you have continued to pour out on me the help of your grace. I have still time in which to love you; I can and I will. You shall be henceforth the God of my heart and of my whole heart. No, you will not despise my poor miserable heart, however unworthy of your care. You will not spurn me, nor my love; for both are your handiwork. O Lord, *despise not the works of thy hands.*

PRAYER.

Your commandment of love, my God, fills my mind with admiration and my heart with an ardent desire of loving you. Let there be no more infidelity on my part, dear Lord; let my heart know no other occupation than that of loving you. Enkindle it; transform it entirely into love for you. Amen.

THIRD DAY.

First Meditation.

On Mortal Sin.

Prayer.

You alone, my God, because you know yourself with a perfect knowledge, you alone know the full malice of sin; you alone detest it as it deserves. Enlighten my mind with the rays of your divine light, make my heart feel as you feel, that I may conceive a sincere contrition for my faults, and so great a horror of sin that never again may I commit even one; never, my God, never, never. Amen.

I Point.

The malice of mortal sin.

God's purpose in creating man was to link him to himself in the bonds of lasting and eternal friendship. If this merciful design had been carried out, God would have found in man a submissive and faithful servant; man would have found in God a tender, liberal and magnificent master; God would have been served and glorified; man would have been happy and covered with glory both in time and in eternity. But sin has overturned this order; and by making man a rebel against his Creator, has covered the culprit with shame, and heaped upon him every sort of misfortune. But who is there who understands, who is even capable of understanding, the malice and abomination of sin?

Sin is as hateful as God is lovable Never can God be loved enough, never can sin be hated as it deserves; it is God's only enemy, the only object which he hates. But he hates it with a hatred which is eternal, necessary and infinite; he hates it as much

as he loves himself. Yes, sin is in God's eyes something so abominable and hideous, that he would die of horror if he were passable and mortal.

Sin is a monster as incomprehensible in its folly, its ingratitude, and its malice as God is incomprehensible in his power, in his goodness, in his greatness and his majesty. He alone knows perfectly the infinity of his perfections, which the sinner attacks and outrages by his revolt. He alone understands the dependence of the creature, and the extent of his dominion over it; he alone then understands the rashness and folly of an earth-worm who, shaking off the yoke of this dependence, dares to declare war against God, to arouse his anger and expose himself to just punishment. He alone understands the ingratitude shewn by sin; for he alone comprehends the multitude, the continuity, the gratitude and the infinite value of the gifts which his liberality incessantly heaps upon us. Our ingratitude has no other measure than that of God's goodness towards us. He alone understands the malice of sin; it is determined by the distance which separates us from God and which raises him above us. This distance is literally infinite, and is besides only fully known by God himself . . . . There is also necessarily a relationship of proportion between sin and hell and the Passion of a God. Hell and its eternal fires are the punishment of sin; the Passion of a God is the only reparation which can appease the anger of God and satisfy his justice. These three things then, sin, hell, and the Passion of a God, are all equally incomprehensible . . . . The horror of sin consists in the contempt of all the divine perfections, of the chastisements of God, of his rewards, of God himself. Sin dares to place God in the balance against passions which are always unreasonable, often shameful and degrading; it dares to give these the preference over God himself, the God whom our mind should esteem and our heart love above every-

thing else in the world. But the dissolute man makes a god of his pleasure; the avaricious man worships money and gold; the god of the glutton is his sensual appetite. In consequence the sinner, so far as he is able, dethrones, destroys and annihilates God, and sets up for himself a new divinity which he adores after the manner of a slave, obeying all its caprices, even at the expense of fortune, honour, health, and to which he immolates an immortal soul, made in the image of God and capable of possessing him. But perhaps some great and pressing motive forces the sinner thus to insult his Creator and Benefactor? Not so, but rather the slightness of the motive grievously aggravates the offence, and draws from God the most bitter complaints. For it is the sinner's will alone that is depraved, he goes astray after transient pleasures, trifles, mere passing gratifications; and shall not this provoke the just indignation of God? *And they violated me among my people for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread.*[1] Is not the malice of mortal sin incomprehensible to a human intelligence?

Therefore the Lord of Glory, having become, in order to wash away our sins, a man of sorrow, a God expiring upon a cross of infamy and making of his blood a bath in which to wash away our crimes, this Lord communicates to our minds clear and abundant light to shew us, as far as is possible, the enormity and malice of sin. The Passion of God caused by sin, the Passion of God renewed by sin, the Passion of God rendered fruitless by sin. . . . These three truths will for all eternity convict sinners of their infidelity to the great and adorable mystery of a God become victim for sin; they will be overwhelmed with despair and their souls will be filled with rage and fury against themselves for their mad folly.

To-day, my God, I understand that it suffices for a Christian to have committed only one mortal sin,

[1] Ezekiel xiii, 19.

in order that he should be condemned to weep over it for all eternity. To this grace I beseech you to add a second; grant to my eyes such abundance of tears that I may weep day and night over the multitude of my offences. Let not the thought of your goodness dry my tears, rather let it cause them to flow with deeper sorrow and contrition. Only the heart of God could bring it about that where sin hath abounded, mercy hath superabounded. If you were capable of death, dear Lord, the horror of my sins would have slain you a thousand times, yet you have never crushed and trampled upon this madman, this traitor, so ungrateful and forsworn! Still more, you continue to seek me, you stretch out a helping hand, you ask again for this rebel heart, or what my sins have left of it. *My God, my Mercy.*[1] May the manner in which you treat me after so many sins touch my heart deeply and urge it strongly to consecrate itself entirely to your love. I will hesitate no longer, every moment of my life my heart shall burn with the fire of charity: had you not stretched out the multitude of your mercies over me, I should have burnt for all eternity in the fires of hell.

II Point.

Act of Contrition.

I have had neither respect for the infinite majesty of God, nor fear of his terrible judgements, nor a desire of the good things he has promised, nor a love of his divine perfection. One alone of these sentiments would have prevented and hindered my wandering from the right path. Blinded by my passions, I was falling from one abyss to another; what would have been the end of this career?

But you have arrested it, O Father of mercies: by your light you have dissipated the darkness of my understanding; by the strength of your grace you

[1] Ps. lviii, 18.

have broken down the hardness of my stony heart; you have pierced it with the arrows of your love. Let my tears flow day and night, let them be my daily bread and my nourishment. Sighs, sobs, sorrow, confusion, contrition, love, fill my heart more and more, and never leave it! I will enter into myself; there the voice of my conscience shall accuse me; the sight of heaven which I deserve to have lost, of hell which I have merited, the creatures who have served as instruments to sin, shall convict me of rebellion; everything shall speak to me of my unfaithfulness, shall recall to mind your infinite goodness and mercy; all shall excite in me sorrow and love.

If the Father whom I have offended were less lovable and less merciful, I might grieve less; but I have outraged and despised a God whose greatness raises him infinitely above me, and whose infinite kindness brings him, so to speak, down to my level, and induces him to pursue after me, a God whose love has nailed him to a cross, but my malice has fastened him there a thousand times. When I consider the ingratitude of my sins, I feel that if I had the contrition of the most illustrious penitents, it would not equal my guilt. Why is not the capacity of my heart as great as the faith by which I am enlightened? This faith teaches me that God is infinitely lovable, that sin is infinitely detestable; why cannot my heart conceive infinite love and infinite hatred?

Adorable Heart of Jesus, I beseech you to supply for all that is wanting in my love and my contrition. You are my only hope, my most precious inheritance. Through you I adore the majesty of God; through you I desire to love the goodness and infinite mercy of God; through you do I repent of my misdeeds. Enkindle in my heart more and more the flames of your own love for God; pour into it the waters of that contrition with which you have washed away my sins. If they render me unworthy of the grace of dying of

love and sorrow, grant me, through your love, the grace of a heart broken with love and sorrow for sin.

III Point.

Act of Resolution.

What are men, be they prophets, be they apostles, what are men, my God, if you do not sustain them?

Trembling at the sight of my weakness, which I have learnt from sad experience; leaning only on your help, which you refuse to no one, I now make a firm and unshakable resolution never more to leave you. Hitherto I have abandoned my heart to sin, I have shut it up against your holy love; to-day I lay it wide open to your love, I close it absolutely to sin. I would rather a thousand times die now for your holy love than live out of your favour.

In order to avoid every obstacle to your grace, I will carefully avoid every occasion of sin, and keep myself courageously as far from danger as I may. I will pull out my eye, I will cut off my arm, I will cast them far from me, lest they should be to me a stumbling-block and a stone of scandal. I will shun creatures to fly to you, who are my first beginning and my last end; I choose you for my inheritance now and for eternity: *Thou art the God that is my portion for ever.*[1] However rich you are, I will ask nothing else but your holy love for my portion and my inheritance.

O my God, my God, who hast given me this good-will, bless it, strengthen it, sustain it in such sort that whatever unexpected occasions shall present themselves, whatever temptations shall attack me, I may never, never be separated from you or from your love.

Prayer.

God of light and grace! May you be eternally blessed for all that you have bestowed on this miser-

[1] Ps. lxxii, 26.

able sinner. Have a special care to uphold my weakness: may I persevere and grow day by day in your holy love, to make reparation for all the time I have lost by not loving you, or rather in which I have outraged your love: may this converted sinner labour with all his might to know and hate sin, to know and love you, his infinitely good and infinitely merciful God. Amen.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Venial Sin.

PRAYER.

By your infinite sanctity, my God, you are infinitely separated from all sin. When will your poor servant begin to imitate your sanctity, as far as is possible to the corruption of his nature? You alone, by the abundance of your graces, can render pure what is conceived in sin. Enlighten, then, my soul, that it may recognize the innumerable multitude of venial sins of which it is guilty; touch my heart with so lively a contrition that it may wipe out the past by a sincere detestation, and may never again commit the smallest venial sin with full deliberation and purpose.

I POINT.

The multitude and malice of our venial sins.

God has commanded me to love him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength; he has also given me sufficient grace to avoid venial sin. Ah! if my fidelity were but equal to his graces, my thoughts, my words and my actions would be pure and free from sin. What a precious life this would be!

But alas! what a difference there is between what

my life ought to have been, what it could have been, and what it actually has been! It might have been resplendent with virtue, but it is all soiled with sin. How eager have I not been to satisfy my senses; how many useless words have I not uttered? In my mind how many thoughts, in my heart how many affections contrary to the sanctity of God! What backwardness in works of piety, what distractions in prayer, how many mixed motives and intentions! My God, what an abuse of grace, what an account shall I not have to render? This account will be all the more formidable because a venial sin is far greater and more grievous than is generally supposed. The malice of it cannot be exactly measured by the slightness of the matter; a momentary distraction, a formal untruth may seem little, but the malice must be estimated by the greatness of him who is offended. It is by this rule that we judge of an injury done to a prince or a king; their greatness, their majesty, their elevation tells in two different ways: it diminishes the value and the glory of our homage, it increases and multiplies the heinousness of the offence, in proportion as we are by our condition separated from these great ones of the earth. The application of this to the God of heaven is obvious, we cannot get away from it.

Hence, as there is no relationship, no comparison between infinite and finite, all and nothing, the Creator and the creature, so there can be no proportion between an injury offered to the one and to the other. Moreover, the annihilation of men and angels is, after all, only the destruction of a creature of nothing; a venial sin, on the contrary, is the evil of the Creator, the evil of God himself.

Hence there is a sense in which one venial sin takes from God more glory than all men and angels put together can give him.

Hence one venial sin can only be adequately atoned for by a Man-God.

Hence every venial sin contains so much malice that its depth is only known to God himself.

Such are the appalling ideas which a true knowledge gives us of venial sin. The saints knew these things perfectly, and with one voice they protest that they would rather suffer the most cruel torments than be guilty of a single venial sin. God grant, said S Teresa, that we should fear what we ought to fear, and that we should be well persuaded that one venial sin can do us more harm than all the powers of hell. For this is the very truth, and anyone who truly loves God and Jesus Christ would prefer the flames of hell to the slightest offence against God. Thus we read in S Chrysostom and S Bernard.

Yes, Lord, I have not yet begun to love you truly, for my life has been one long series of venial sins. Would that I could weep over them, and wash them away with tears of blood! May you be for ever blessed, my God, who dost take such pleasure in shewing mercy to the most unworthy of your creatures. To-day you have exercised this mercy towards me in putting before me in quite a new light the malice of venial sin; you have revealed to me a truth which many others will only know on the day of their judgement, when it will be too late to find a remedy.

Thus enlightened, I detest sincerely and from the bottom of my heart all my sins, particularly those which have been most habitual, which I have committed with the greatest malice and advertence, those which have been an occasion of sin to my neighbour, those, lastly, which have put most obstacles in the way of God's grace. In future, when even a small temptation presents itself, I shall see, by the help of your grace, the danger to which I am exposed of losing for ever your love, the injury I should do to your glory, how deeply I should offend your divine majesty. What power should not such motives have over a heart which loves you sincerely!

II Point.

The Consequences of venial sin.

I do not here speak of those terrible chastisements which the Holy Spirit tells us God has sometimes inflicted on sins which appear to us very slight and almost imperceptible. Neither do I speak of that temporary hell, that is, purgatory, in which God purifies his gold by the same fires which in hell consume the chaff. Some motives for avoiding sin are good and useful; our Lord Jesus Christ himself puts them before us in the Gospel, and certainly they can and ought to stifle, in a soul which has the faith, the least will to deliberate sin.

But I speak to a heart which loves God sincerely and with all its might; it alone can understand the misery which is the consequence of one venial sin; it will conceive such a horror of it that the fear of a thousand deaths would not induce it to commit the slightest fault against the light of grace.

1. A venial sin does not deprive the soul simply and absolutely of divine love; that is the result only of mortal sin; but as soon as it has sin upon it, the soul is deprived of fresh graces which it would undoubtedly have received; it is deprived also of a fresh degree of glory which it might have acquired by fidelity; it is deprived of a new degree of love which the heart of God would have conceived for it. One grace, one degree of love from me for God, from God for me, what a treasure, what a gift! It is worth more than the whole world, it is worth as much as God himself, since God is of all beings most loving, most to be loved, and can be possessed more perfectly than any other object. How much then does not a soul lose by negligence, by self-love, by infidelity!

2. If, full of a just horror of venial sin, you have had the wisdom to avoid it with care, to combat your passions, to resist occasions of danger; if, at the

least, you have washed it out by your tears and made reparation by sincere penitence, the moment when your soul leaves the body will also be the moment when you will enter into the possession and the joy of your Lord. But if there remains on your soul at the moment of death the guilt of one venial sin, God will say to you, You cannot see me yet. This sin must delay for you the happiness of enjoying my presence, and you must suffer in purgatory the pain of loss for a while. If, even in hell, where God is hated, this privation of God is the most cruel and intolerable of the torments of the damned; if, according to the saying of S Augustine, this suffering is as great as God is great;[1] what will not be the suffering in purgatory of a just soul, a soul which desires God, and which loves him alone? A heart which loves sincerely will understand what I say; and a Teresa, who languished with love, and whose heart was almost broken with the longing to see her God, would have been terrified at such a thought.

What shall we then say of a Christian who, by the multitude of his venial sins, by his cowardliness in satisfying for mortal ones which have been pardoned, voluntarily condemns himself to remain separated from God after death perhaps for half a century, a whole century, perhaps even till the end of the world? Such a Christian assuredly does not realize how dangerous and criminal is his indifference to God, to his glory and his own interest. Neither does he understand the happiness of possessing God, and the misery of being separated from him. In very truth, a blessing of which we deprive ourselves every day, thoughtlessly and for trifles, has little value in our eyes; and when it comes to wilfully putting off the possession of it for an indefinite number of years, would we not easily deprive ourselves of it altogether, if by doing so we could keep the petty satisfactions which we prefer to it?

[1] *Tanta poena, quantus Deus.*

3. What will be the consequences of one venial sin throughout eternity? They are terrible. I will explain.

If, during life I form a thought, I say words, I perform an action, I suffer something for God's sake and for his love: this act is a germ which will be reborn, which will be renewed throughout eternity. For all this eternity I shall know God more clearly, I shall love him more tenderly, and God, on his side, will love me more perfectly. For all eternity God will be more glorified and I shall be more happy in God and for God. This is the result of one single act of love of God, made during our earthly life.

If, on the contrary, I lend my mind, my tongue, my heart, to venial sin: the result is the exact opposite. This venial sin will destroy throughout eternity the happy fruits which would have unceasingly accrued if my act of love had taken its place. Throughout eternity God will be less glorified, less loved and less loving.

Has not such a notion, well thought over and deeply pondered, great power to touch a heart which loves fervently and only desires the glory of God? Doubtless, it will rather suffer a thousand deaths than hinder all those acts of praise, adoration and love which it would have produced in the present life, and which will never cease to be produced until the consummation of the ages by all the just and the saints. Yet, in a sense, I have done worse than this. All these acts are essentially limited and finite in number; on the contrary, the moments of eternity are without number or end; thus, by committing one single venial sin, by turning away my eyes and my intention from God for a single moment, by substituting a motive purely natural for one that is Christian and supernatural, I have lost for all the moments of my eternity a degree of the love of God, I have deprived God of a degree of praise, adoration, glory and love. What shall I think then of the

multitude of my faults, of so many thoughts, words and actions useless for eternity?

If then I am not blindly ignorant of the infinite greatness of God, and the infinite value of his glory and his love, I ought to weep bitterly for the wrong which I have done to God and to myself: I ought to be ready to die rather than to continue my former life. If only, for the rest of my life, I could so multiply my acts of contrition and love that they should equal the number of my infidelities! If I could only form such vehement acts of contrition and love that their value should outweigh and repair the harm I have done!

At least, my God, since one single act of love for you procures you so much glory here below; since after my death, it will continue to enhance your glory through all eternity, I desire (I have made the resolution, by the help of your grace, and with the assistance of the same grace I hope to fulfil it), I desire to do and suffer everything through love; I will only speak for love, only act for love, only breathe in love, through love and for love. Amen, my God, Amen.

PRAYER.

May the conclusion of my meditation be also, my God, the end of my cowardice and my infidelity: may it be the commencement of a new life, of a life free from sin, filled with all virtues, and especially with your love.

FOURTH DAY.

First Meditation.

On Death.

Prayer.

In order that I may fulfil my part of the pact which I have just made with you, my God, grant, by your infinite mercy, that the thought of death may now continually occupy my mind, and make a vivid impression on my heart. By means of this I hope to be enabled to keep my promise; I will destroy in myself all that displeases you, and I will live henceforth continually in and for your love.

I Point.

On the utility of frequent and serious meditation upon death.

Death is absolutely inevitable; every moment of life brings it nearer to us, and us nearer to it; the sentence which condemned to death all the children of Adam is carried out upon all without exception, and will be until the end of the world. One must be mad to entertain the least doubt about this; and it would be wicked to resist so simple a truth.

Reflect frequently and seriously on the last ends for which you were created. Death is the first of these ends: upon a good or bad death depend all the rest, since it determines whether they will be happy or disastrous; hence the wise man says: *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*[1] This pronouncement of the Holy Spirit is more certain than all our reasoning. Let us do what he counsels, and we shall infallibly obtain what he promises.

[1] Eccl. vii, 40.

Death is evidently the privation, entire and eternal, of everything this visible world contains: riches, honours, pleasures and all those objects which withdraw the mind and heart of man from God. Man must then make his choice; will he immolate to his God and to his duty the objects of his passions, or will he retain them to be snatched from him by death, perhaps in a few days' time? Will he forsake freely and meritoriously all these deceitful goods, or will he suffer the loss of them in spite of himself and without merit? A wise man will know how to choose; if he is religious, he will infallibly carry out what his reason approves, that is, if he has accustomed himself to reflect on these things.

Death is the passing from this life to the next, in which man, despoiled and stripped of everything created, finds himself quite alone with God; alone with God, who will be his eternal happiness, if he has served and loved him; whose loss will mean his eternal misery, if he has violated his holy law. Can a man of faith nourish his soul on these considerations without coming to the practical conclusion that he has but one interest in the world, and that this interest is to love God, and even to love him to the full extent of the grace given him? For a holy death is not only, for the just man, the beginning of a happy eternity; it determines what degree of happiness will be his during that eternity.

Death is most certain; its hour is equally uncertain. I know that I must die, but I do not know either the hour or the day of my death. All that I know is, that those who seem to have every reason to promise themselves a long life are often those who, though they little suspect it, are at its very threshold; all that I know is, that my death may come to-day as easily as to-morrow, that I shall die at the moment I least expect. Yes, indeed, if I consent to sin, I may die at that instant, and perish eternally; shall I then sin, shall I remain in my sin, shall I not rather make

God my friend by my submission and my love? I must indeed be either mad or wicked if I do not know which to choose.

If such advantages are to be gained from the thought of death, shall we find it too difficult to reflect on it? Our parents, friends and neighbours who disappear from sight day by day, the tolling bell, the mourning garments, all the exterior marks of bereavement we so constantly meet with, even the succession of the seasons, night following day, are not all these so many warnings of the approach of death?

Oh! how happy I am, my God! Everything tells me to love you. Life has been given me for this glorious purpose; the necessity of death preaches the indispensable duty of loving you; the uncertainty of my last hour forbids me to live for one moment estranged from your love. The state in which I shall die, because it is the measure of my happiness for all eternity, urges me to love you with all possible perfection. To love you, my God, to love you most tenderly, this shall be my one occupation and employment in life.

II Point.

The Death of the Sinner.

To arouse my love more and more, I will consider how cruel, how tragic, is the death of one who dies without love, and in a state of sin. *The death of the wicked is very evil.*[1]

He had forgotten God, this sinner, he had lived a life of pleasure; then death came to interrupt his course, and to snatch from him, in spite of himself, the objects for which he had sinned. But with what grief does he now see himself for ever separated from all that he has loved so passionately; the soul itself cannot without a terrible wrench quit that body

[1] Ps. xxxiii, 22.

which it has cherished so tenderly. But this is only the beginning of his woe.

Where can he turn for comfort? If he enters into himself his conscience heaps reproaches upon him, and the voice of his disorderly life demands vengeance. If he goes out of himself, at his right hand his Angel guardian, afflicted and indignant, must sorrowfully abandon him; at his left, the demons, full of joy, are waiting to seize his soul. What does he see below him? Hell, and the place which is prepared for him there. Above him is his angry judge, and he hears the sentence of eternal ruin; all around nothing but objects of horror and motives for rage and despair.

In such crushing circumstances, will he attempt to appease Jesus Christ his judge? His memory will tell him that God has chosen the moment of the sinner's death for that of his punishment. During life (says the book of Proverbs),[1] the sinner has mocked and insulted God: at death, God will in turn mock and reproach him. His word is sure on this terrible point.

Perhaps we may have seen sinners die tranquilly, without any trouble or disquiet, but this is only the effect of a faith which is entirely dead, and such callousness is the most certain proof of eternal reprobation. For when the sinner closes his eyes to the light of this world, he opens them to that of eternity. Then he will see in his soul the horror and abomination of mortal sin, henceforth his lot for ever; he hears the irrevocable sentence of his damnation, and he begins his miserable eternity in the fires of hell. My God, I cannot any longer endure the thought of such horrors; they make me shudder, they are overwhelming. What then will be the reality? Better to suffer a thousand times the most cruel kinds of death than expose myself to the terrible and tragic death of an unrepentant sinner. I have a sure, easy,

[1] Prov. i, 25, 26.

delightful way of avoiding this sad lot; it is that of loving you, my Jesus. Either to love or to die, either my heart shall love you, or let it be here and now annihilated. Love, love of my Jesus, reign in my heart, possess my soul.

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

What do I not owe to your love for me? Where should I now be if you had permitted death to strike me in a state of sin? Here is a fresh motive for loving you yet more deeply. From my heart I detest all my sins, I renounce them for ever; and if by a misfortune which I beseech you to prevent by my death, I should ever lose my innocence again, sleep shall not close my eyes nor will I live one moment out of your grace. After a sincere resolution to make my confession as soon as possible, I will endeavour at once to wash out my guilt by an act of love, a lively act of contrition. From this moment I beg of you the grace of that charity which covers a multitude of sins; I ask it of you by the merits of your Passion and by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, of the Angels and of the Saints.

Second Meditation.

On the death of the just.

Prayer.

To the many graces you have already granted me, and which have prevented me all my life, I beg you, my God, to add that of dying the death of the just. To this death, always precious in your sight, you sometimes add other graces which greatly enhance its value. Those things which I have not merited, I may ask your mercy to grant, and I may hope to obtain them from your infinite bounty.

I Point.

Death in habitual love.

To die in the grace and love of God, and then to find oneself loved by God in return, can there be any happiness equal to this? Death places the just man in the happy state of being no longer able to sin; it renders his love stable and unchangeable; it is but a passage from the miseries of this life to the joys of a happy eternity. What price could be too great to pay for such an advantage?

And if the death of the just is so happy, it is also most sweet and consoling. The past, the present, the future, all are certain pledges of eternal life. Looking on his past he sees with joy his merits and the gifts he has received from God, the victories he has obtained, the virtues he has practised. In the present, the sincerity of his contrition, the patience which has overcome so many sufferings, his confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, the love with which he repeats over and over again the sweet name of Jesus, with which he kisses his crucifix, and clasps it to his breast, all bring him so much consolation that he must sometimes cry out with the celebrated Suarez: *No, never could I have believed that it was so sweet to die.* The future shews him the crown he has merited, and causes him transports of joy. He has fought his fight well,[1] he has been faithful, he loves, he is loved; what has he to expect but the crown of justice?

Sometimes God, whose judgements are impenetrable, takes from the just man at the hour of death all feeling of spiritual consolation; he afflicts him with interior trials and torments him with fears and terrors. But this faithful lover and imitator of Jesus Christ finds his true consolation in having no consolations on this earth: his joy is to be like his God

[1] II Tim. iv, 7.

expiring on the Cross; he even prefers to the delights of Paradise the happiness of dying a victim immolated to the glory of God. O Love, how powerful, how wonderful you are! Even death, so repulsive to nature, you make sweet and agreeable. Whether you are consoling or crucifying, you fill the soul with delights. Happy in life and in death is he who possesses you; unhappy in time and in eternity is he who lives and dies without you.

II Point.

Death in actual love.

To die in the state of actual love, so that our last sigh is a sigh of love, the movement of a soul darting towards its God, and losing itself in the bosom of God, how much more precious a death this is than that of which we have just spoken. If my desires and my prayers are as efficacious as they are sincere, you, Jesus my Saviour, will accord me such a death. I ask this grace for the infinite love with which your adorable heart loves me; I ask it by the merits of your own death. It is an inexhaustible treasure; there are neither extraordinary graces nor excellent gifts which it cannot obtain for us; the weakness of a created nature makes it unable to enjoy all its fruits, since they are infinite.

My prayer would not be sincere if I did not, on my side, bring the necessary preparation and dispositions for obtaining what I do so earnestly ask.

1. By avoiding the slightest faults, and occupations and thoughts which are even merely useless, by great care to repress every outburst of passion, I will endeavour to acquire a purity of heart as perfect as possible. This purity of heart, this simplicity of aim and intention will keep my soul always in the disposition to accept God's graces and to correspond with them.

2. My interior occupation shall be to desire, and often to beg for divine love, frequently to produce acts of it, to keep myself continually in a state of abandonment to divine grace, and of progress in the love of God.

3. Always loving and acting, loving and suffering, I shall suffer all through love and for love.

Yes, I have a God to love; can there be any sweeter or more noble occupation? This great God is always loving me, always giving me grace to love him. I desire, yes, I desire to begin to love him without ceasing in this life, so that I may live and die in the act of loving him, and that I may go, immediately after death, to love him eternally in heaven.

III Point.

Death suffered for love.

To die for God's interests, for the cause of Jesus Christ, as the martyrs did, this is the most certain proof of love; it is at least to love God more than oneself, more than life, and confess it by our sufferings and the shedding of our blood. Illustrious confessors, I would share your glory; I would unite myself with you in thanking with you him who is the author of it. I envy your happiness, which I cannot hope to share. But wait, is this really so?

God hears the preparation of our hearts; and in place of actual martyrdom, when this is not possible to us, he will accept our sincere desires as if they had been carried into effect. My God, you who examine our hearts, you know that there is not a single drop of blood in my veins which does not desire to be poured out for your glory and the glory of Jesus my Saviour.

There is besides, more than one kind of martyrdom. One can be a martyr to obedience, to penance, to zeal, to Christian charity. Such kinds of martyrdom if less terrifying at first sight, cost perhaps no less to nature because the suffering is

continuous and long drawn out. I accept all these kinds of martyrdom for your love, my Jesus; and if I may not die a martyr, may I at least live a martyr. I accept with all my heart the contradictions, sufferings, humiliations and crosses which in your providence you think good to send me, either directly yourself, or by means of creatures. I accept death as a sentence which your justice has pronounced against me in punishment for my sins; I accept it as an act of homage which I shall offer, by the destruction of my being, to your eternity and your immortality. In a word, life and death, light and darkness, consolations and desolations, I desire all and I desire nothing save for your love.

IV Point.

Death caused by love.

To die in habitual love, to die in the actual performance of an act of pure love, to die for love, is not this the most precious and happy end one could make? Yet how much more glorious would it be to die of love in such a way that the very ardour, impetuosity, the vehemence of divine love should take away life; this would be the height of my desires if it were permitted to so miserable a sinner to soar so high.

Such a death was that of S' Francis of Assisi; such was the ardour of love with which S Teresa languished, and which consumed and ended her life. The love of our Lady, blessed above all other creatures, was incontestably an ecstasy of the most vehement and devouring love; grace had enkindled in her heart, from the first moment of her existence, a charity so burning that without a miracle she could not have endured its effects. And so, after having lived continually in love, of love and for love, she died of love. What a holy envy has not this death excited in the saints!

If there is no presumption in my desires, if my prayer does not offend you, Jesus my Saviour, grant me, through the intercession of Mary, your Mother, the grace of a death like to yours and hers. You died for me with love, in love, and through love for me; may I die for you in the same manner. Life of love, death of love, all love for you who are all love for me. Amen.

PRAYER.

Adorable Heart of my Jesus, Heart all love and charity, the grace for which I beg for myself and for so many sinners who are less unworthy than I, you are able to grant: your Father's glory demands it. We accept with joy all the trials through which your love would have us pass, if they lead to a death so happy and holy. Be ever in us, good Jesus, all love for us: may we also be ever in you, all love for you. love for love.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the general judgement.

PRAYER.

For what reason, Lord, have you revealed to me what took place at the beginning of the world, and what will happen at its end? It is evidently that I may learn to live and breathe only for you, and because you will demand an exact and terrible account of the manner in which I have fulfilled this, my first duty. Penetrate my soul, my God, with fear of your judgements, that I may live in your love, and that my Judge may prove to be also my friend.

I POINT.

The misery of a soul that has not loved God.

God is infinitely lovable; he has an infinite desire to be loved by us, he has left no stone unturned to

make us love him. He who does not understand the extent of these three truths cannot understand either how great is the misery of a soul which has lived deprived of love for God.

Such a soul will see Jesus Christ clothed with power, glory and majesty; it will see his divine perfections and his beauty; it will see and read on his countenance his titles of Saviour, friend and spouse: it will see the cross to which his love has fastened him, the wounds he has willed to preserve even in the state of glory. The sight of Jesus, infinitely lovable and infinitely loving, but whom it has not chosen to love while it could easily have done so, and whom it cannot love now that it would, this sight will be even more unbearable than the fire of hell itself.

This Jesus will speak; he will say: I do not ask you to repay me for all that I have done for you; I immolated my life willingly and joyfully; but I do ask what you have done with your heart. It was mine; I bought it with the price of my blood. To shew you the immense charity with which my Heart burnt for you, to lead you to this unfailing source of all graces, it was laid open for you by love. In spite of all the efforts of my love, in spite of my most tender endeavours, in spite of my threats, you have not deigned to enter into it. Hard heart, insensible to my love, but only too sensitive to the love of creatures, you have not loved me, but what have you loved instead? On what unworthy objects have you poured out all the strength of your passions? What will it answer to these crushing reproaches? And finally, Jesus Christ will utter the most terrible sentence that can issue from the mouth of God, and which a creature can hear: *Depart from me.*[1] *You are not my people, and I will not be yours.*[2] I wished to be your happiness, I shall be your eternal misery: you have not had a spark of love for me, you shall

[1] Mt. xxv, 41. [2] Osee i, 9.

be devoured by the flames of hell. In the first place I did not prepare hell for you, but for the devil and his angels; you have shared their malice, you shall also share their fate.

Scarcely will Jesus Christ have finished pronouncing the sentence when it will be carried out. Heaven and hell alike will approve it. Anathema to anyone who does not endorse it with his whole heart. Yes, my God, when you cover a soul with confusion for all eternity, when you condemn it to burn in that fire which shall never be extinguished, this soul is one which has refused to love you, and your sentence is most just and necessary;[1] were I to be one of these miserable ones, I know you could not treat me otherwise, I acquiesce in the sentence.

But, Lord, you only condemn those who do not love you, and I do love you; with all my heart I love you, or at least I desire so to love you.

II Point.

The blessedness of a soul which loves God.

The day of unveiling is for a soul that loves God and Jesus Christ the most beautiful and magnificent triumph that can possibly be imagined. In the presence of the angels and of the entire world, the sovereign Judge will make manifest the victories and the virtues of his faithful servant, he will also avenge all that it has suffered. After having clothed it with the garment of a blessed immortality, after having crowned it with a glorious diadem, he will invite it to sit beside him on his throne, and will share with it the delights of his kingdom, according to the measure of the love which it has had for its God.

But this great soul will perhaps not be thinking of its own glory, but will care only for the interests of God. Well, what joy will it experience when, in

[1] *Cf.* Ps. cxviii, 137: "Thou art just, O Lord; thy sentence is right."

the general assembly of the whole universe, it will see Jesus Christ acknowledged and adored by atheists, by the wicked, and every tongue shall confess that he is in the glory of God his Father,[1] God of God, light of light, and that it was nothing but love that caused him so to abase and annihilate himself, and bring himself down to our level.

What a joy for this great soul; when, every other power, every other domination being destroyed, it sees Jesus Christ the sole Master, the sole Judge, alone great, alone powerful; all his enemies shall serve as his footstool, and his hand will be raised to reduce them all to powder as if they were earthen vessels!

What a joy for this great soul when, by general consent, vice shall be confounded and virtue honoured, the false wisdom of the world condemned as folly; the folly of the Cross revered as the only true wisdom; when the friends of Jesus Christ will be judged worthy of participating in the glory and happiness of God himself, and his enemies, groaning and accusing themselves, will be condemned to eternal torment, because they have not responded to the love of God.

With what transports of joy will this great soul contemplate the moment which shall be the end of time and the beginning of eternity; the moment when all shall be repaired and eternal and unchangeable order established; the moment when all creatures, without exception, shall commence, either in heaven or in hell, an eternal canticle in praise of God. Some will sing of his goodness, mercy and magnificence; others will recognize his justice and his retribution; all will extol his majesty, sanctity and glory.

My God, when I bring together and unite in my thought those two days so far distant from each other, I mean that in which you created the world with that in which you will destroy it, I am over-

[1] Phil. ii, 11.

powered by the sight of your greatness and majesty. How adorable, how lovable you appear to me on both these days, but that which I love best is the one in which you will judge the world; for it is then, if I may so express myself, that your Godhead will be most completely manifested. No, my tongue has no words to express what my heart will feel at the sight of your glory and that of your friends in that day of your magnificence.

Prayer.

What will it profit me, my God, to be enlightened concerning the happy or unhappy fate of those who have or have not loved you during life, if the unction of your grace does not touch my heart, and determine it to love you generously and constantly till death? Most fervently do I implore this grace, and I ask it for the sake of the desire you have of possessing my love.

FIFTH DAY.

First Meditation.

Hell.

Prayer to God.

My God, charity is the end and aim of your law: everything in it, without destroying particular motives or the merit of other virtues, goes to produce, augment and conserve more and more your love in our hearts. It is these salutary effects which I hope to attain by the thought of hell, with the help of your grace. It is my desire that everything should speak to me of your love for me, that everything should invite me to love you. You will surely hear, Lord, a request which cannot but please you.

I Point.

The privation of God is the most cruel pain of hell.

Heaven is to possess every good, without any admixture of evil; hell is to endure every ill, without any admixture of good; it is the place where every kind of suffering will be undergone, the place of torments.[1] But among these torments, the most cruel will be never to have loved God during life, with no possibility of loving him in future.

When Esau considered on the one hand his plate of lentils, and on the other the birthright he had sold, the paternal blessing he had forfeited, how great was his sorrow; he *roared out*, says the Scripture, *with a great cry*.[2] This is but a feeble image of a soul in hell. He will consider what he has loved during life, and what he has not loved; and this comparison will cause him a mortal sorrow, utter despair.

What, he will say to himself, have I loved? Passing and perishable things, which have abandoned

[1] Luke xvi, 28. [2] Gen. xxvii, 34.

me for eternity; and I have not loved God, alone immortal, alone eternal, alone capable of making me happy for ever.

What have I loved? Pleasures which make my reason blush, which have perhaps even ruined my fortune and my health, which have been a cause of bitterness and shame; and I have not loved God, infinitely lovable for all his perfections, and for the desire he has of my love, for all he has done and all he has suffered for me.

It is just that I should burn in these flames, in punishment of the bad use to which I have put my love. But the most cruel part of all my sufferings will always be the thought of what I have done and what I have left undone, this will be far worse than any fire. For a reprobate soul, in the light which now causes him to despair, knows and sees without possibility of doubt, the greatness and majesty of God. The torment he feels teaches him the terrible sanctity of God and the abominable malice of sin; from the total loss of all things created he sees perfectly the vanity of all that he has preferred to God. The knowledge of these three truths is more clear, more intimate and more persuasive in a reprobate soul than in the greatest Saint while still in this world. Yes some of these Saints have actually died of grief at the sight of sin; the fires of hell have appeared to them less formidable than the loss of divine love. O love! what a precious treasure you are for time and for eternity! How inconceivable a torment is your loss, not for the animal man, who only sees things in the obscurity of the flesh, but for a reprobate who sees them in the light of eternity!

Yes, hell would be a Paradise, in spite of its fires, if one could there taste the delights of divine love. Paradise, in spite of its beauty and riches, would be a hell, if one did not there possess either God or his love. When he would describe to S Catherine of Siena the greatest of all his woes, the devil had good

reason to say "I am he who loves not." Alas, Lord, have not I been often enough and for long together, one who does not love you? Would that I could blot out from the number of my years those days and months when I did not love you. Would that my tears were as abundant, my regrets as bitter as those of the reprobate. Theirs are a sign of despair, because they can no longer love you; mine shall be my consolation and joy, because they shall be a proof of my love and pledge of yours.

II Point.

Belief in hell teaches us to love God.
First Motive.

When a father commands his children something under most severe penalties, they say to one another: "We know our father's character; he is full of kindness and tenderness: yet he has attached to the command he has given us the threat of terrible punishment: he must therefore be extraordinarily desirous that we should observe it." You, my God, are this good father, the very essence of your being is goodness and charity for us; yet you threaten us with hell. What is more terrible than fire? What more formidable than a fire enkindled by the breath of your wrath? What more desperate than eternal fire?

But why, my God, have you prepared for us such cruel punishments? It is to compel us to love you. What shame and confusion this ought to cause us! It is the hardness and wickedness of our hearts which has obliged you to enkindle fire eternal for those who will not love you. Is it indeed possible that a heart which has received life from your hands, and with life an infinite number of other blessings: a heart taught by experience that it can find no true happiness out of you; a heart which you have bought at

the price of so many reproaches and sufferings, does not love you? To many motives for loving you, must you add also threats?

But in view of these threats, what ought I to think of the intense desire you have of my love? From the immensity, the eternity of the sufferings which you have prepared in case I prove ungrateful, I may understand the immensity, the infinity of your desire; or rather, I see that these two things are equally incomprehensible. My God, what are you, and what am I? What is my heart that you should desire with such ardour to possess it?

You have only poured into my soul the light of faith, you have only revealed to me the eternal torments which will avenge your unrequited love, in order to teach me to avoid them; that at the lowest, the fear of your justice should bring me to love your love, your bounty and your mercy.

My God, shall I be able to find anywhere but in you a God so worthy of my love, so liberal and magnificent a benefactor, so faithful and tender a friend, and one who desires so ardently to be loved? For I must either love you or burn for ever in hell. How can I hesitate? There is nothing so cruel as hell, nothing so sweet as your love. I love you, and I swear to you an enduring and constant love, less from fear of your punishments than for the infinite tenderness of the love you have manifested to me in shewing how terrible is your vengeance.

III Point.

Second motive for loving God.

If you have kept your baptismal innocence, if you have never lost the grace of God by any mortal sin, you have indeed a precious privilege, and a rare one. To whom do you owe it?

You have no doubt about this, faithful soul, and you are well persuaded that if divine love had not

watched over you with a most particular attention, if it had not held you by the hand, almost all your footsteps would have led to some considerable fall. With what loving gratitude have you not often cried out in your heart: "If I have not been lost in sin, it is solely because of your mercy, my God; if I have not a thousand times cast myself into hell, it is your arm which has held me back on the edge of the precipice."[1]

If you have ever sinned mortally, you have deserved hell. A hundred times, a thousand times, God might have cast you therein; he has not done it; his justice demanded vengeance on you, but his mercy would never consent. What kindness, what love for one ungrateful, a rebel and an enemy! Only the heart of God could feel thus. Yet this is not enough.

Not only has God not willed your ruin, but what has he not done to save you in spite of your sins? His patience awaits you with inconceivable long-suffering; his goodness seeks and prevents you; his mercy offers pardon; his liberality pours out on you lights and graces in great abundance. Can any human heart remain untouched by such motives?

Are not the flames of hell, attentively meditated by either the just man or the sinner, a most effectual motive for exciting in the soul the flames of divine love? Whatever it may be for the just, I am a sinner, and God, out of pure mercy, has as many times delivered me from hell as I have tried to cast myself into it by my sins. When I consider what I have deserved to be, and what I am, I feel that my gratitude and love ought, if possible, to equal the greatness of the sins of which I have been guilty, and from which your infinite love has delivered me. Flames for flames, dear Lord. Since by a most admirable effect of your goodness, I am not now actually burning in the fires of hell, let me burn and be consumed by the fire of your love. I owe this to your

[1] *Cf.* Thren. iii.

mercy, I desire it, and I will spare no means of succeeding in this, the most ardent and noble of desires.

PRAYER.

My God, who dost furnish me with so many motives for living in your love and for your love, enlighten my mind; make it well understand that the very hell of hell is not to love you; touch my heart; penetrate it with the most lively gratitude, and the most ardent love of the mercy which you have shewn in regard of this most miserable sinner.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Purgatory.

PRAYER.

You only punish us, my God, either in this world or in the next, because we have not been faithful in loving you as you wish and as you deserve. Grant us, of your infinite mercy, so perfect a love for you that it may wash out, not only the stains of past faults, but also the debt we owe to your divine justice, and which shall preserve us from sin in future. Then immediately after death, we shall go to see and love you in heaven. Amen.

I POINT.

Let us have compassion on ourselves.

There is a Purgatory; this is an article of faith, resting on the words of both Old and New Testaments, and decided under pain of anathema. This purgatory is a kind of temporary hell. There is suffered, as in hell, the pain of loss by the privation of God; the pain of the senses by the torment of fire: and what fire, save the same fire which burns in hell? And in such sort, as says S Thomas, that a quarter of an hour in purgatory is a more cruel agony than all the torments of the martyrs put

together. What a subject for compassion! Shall we never understand that when we sin, whatever be the nature of the sin, whether it be mortal or venial, we offend what we ought to hold most dear to us in the world, I mean God and ourselves?

When we sin, we offend God, our Creator, our Preserver, our Redeemer, our constant Benefactor; faithless and forsworn, we violate the solemn promises we have made; ungrateful and treacherous, we use his gifts against himself. Dear Lord, take away the life you have given me, annihilate me rather than permit such a disorder, so monstrous a treason.

When we sin, we injure ourselves, we wound ourselves. For in the last resort, we cannot offend God with impunity, and no sin can evade the avenging hand of a God who is infinitely holy and infinitely powerful. The wages of sin is either hell or purgatory. Where then is our love for God, our love for ourselves? For a trifle, for a mere nothing we condemn ourselves to suffer, perhaps for a whole century; let us also remember that the pain of loss, considered in itself, will be more intolerable in purgatory even than in hell. A holy soul retained by divine justice in the prison of purgatory, will by a natural impulse tend with all its force towards God, its centre and its whole happiness, as well as by all the strength of its love. The reprobate soul, on the contrary, will only tend towards God by the first of these two movements. How foolish are we then, when we fear slight and passing evils, and have no dread for those which may be so long and terrible. What a contradiction this is!

What shall we do, then? Let us endeavour to do our purgatory in this world, and to imitate on earth the life which the souls of the just will lead in the place of their purification.

(1) They no longer sin; let us sin no more. There is no particular sin which we cannot avoid by the help of divine grace, which is always at our call. Let

us receive this grace, let us faithfully co-operate with it, and we shall no longer sin, at least deliberately and with full advertence. The grace which God offers us to form in us humility, patience and the other virtues, if we do not resist it, will prevent so many of those sins which pride and impatience have caused us to commit.

(2) These poor souls are always suffering, but always submissive, always loving and always sighing for the happy moment which will bring them into the presence of God. This is what we ought to do. Let our crosses always find us resigned to the will of God; let us kiss and adore the hand of our Father which chastises or tries us for our good; let us groan over the duration of our exile and sigh unceasingly for our heavenly country. How long, my God, before we see you, how long before we love you perfectly!

Love, suffering, groaning, sighing, this is a most sweet purgatory for a true Christian. For long and terrible pains it substitutes those which are very short and full of sweetness; it obtains great graces for us in this life; it hastens our entry into the kingdom of love; at every moment it prepares for us crowns of eternal glory. No more sin, then; never, if possible, another sin. Instead, love ever suffering, which may expiate the sins we have already committed; love groaning and sighing, which will keep us from further sin.

II Point.

Let us have compassion on the souls in Purgatory.

The same love which ought to inspire us to make every effort to preserve ourselves from purgatory, ought to move us to do the same to deliver those just souls who suffer less the torment of fire than the privation of God. Three or four reflections may serve to rekindle our charity towards them.

(1) The more we love God, the more perfectly shall

we endeavour to carry out his will. If our heavenly Father can only reluctantly determine, so to speak, to punish a rebellious slave, if he ardently desires to find an excuse for mitigating his wrath, with what regret will he not punish children whom he loves and who love him? With what ardour will he desire to find a mediator[1] who will satisfy his justice? Consequently, zeal for the release of the souls in purgatory is inseparable from a true love of God, and renders us very pleasing to our merciful Father.

(2) He who loves God, loves also his neighbour. The more our neighbour is suffering, the more eager will this love be to succour him. Who are those who are suffering in purgatory? Are they not living members of Jesus Christ? Among them may be your own father or your best friend. What do they suffer? One must have experienced it in order to describe it. What can we obtain for them? The greatest, the most precious of all blessings. You can do this, yet you do not, or rarely and lazily: if so, your heart is shut to the love of God and of your neighbour.

(3) The world is full of those who are ungrateful to God and to men; but ingratitude can find no place in heaven. The soul whom you deliver from purgatory, or whose sufferings you at least lessen, is bound to have for you a gratitude in proportion to what you have done for it; God himself will thank you for helping him to obtain his desires for this soul. What may you not expect from it and from God during life and at the moment of death, in this world and in purgatory? This is true love, to forget oneself in some sort, and to transfer the satisfactory part of our good works to those souls which are being purified by the loving hand of God.

Let us arouse ourselves; let love for God, love for ourselves, love for our neighbour reanimate our tenderness and sympathy for these holy souls, so

[1] Ezech. xxii, 30, "And I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge," etc.

worthy of compassion. Indulgences, almsdeeds, mortification, good works, and prayers, all these are easy means by which we can help them.

Let us not stop there. Let us procure help for them also by animating our friends as well to the exercise of this excellent work, so advantageous to Christian charity. But while we inspire them to have compassion on the suffering souls, let us inspire them also to compassionate themselves, by a horror of the least venial sin, by love, and burning love for God and Jesus Christ. But we must first ourselves burn with this sacred fire if we wish to enkindle others with its flames.

PRAYER.

Do not permit me, Lord, to continue to increase and prolong the pains due to me in purgatory by the multitude of my venial sins. Rather let me wash them out by contrition and penance; let me live in so great purity of heart, in so fervent a practice of good works that every moment may procure for me an increase of your love, so that immediately after my death I may go without delay to love you eternally in heaven. Amen.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Paradise.

PRAYER.

Spirits of the Blessed, saints in glory, you have reached the goal, to which we are still travelling. You can no longer grow either in love for God, or in zeal for his glory, but we can do both. Obtain for us then by your prayer what we are unworthy to obtain by our own. And you, Father of mercies, grant us by the intercession of the angels and saints the grace of living on earth the life of heaven. No more sin; nothing but love; but pure love, continual love, love such as befits travellers, that is love ever growing and burning with ever fresh flames.

I Point.
God wills to be loved.

Whatever opposition there may be between heaven and hell, they unite in giving me the same lesson; both teach me how much God desires to be loved. If I do not love him, hell will be my eternal abode; if I do love him, paradise will be my inheritance.

Paradise! A kingdom which surpasses in riches, in beauty, in delight all that the eye has ever seen, the ear heard, all that the human mind can conceive or the heart desire![1] Paradise, in which the senses will find their satisfaction in a degree as inconceivable as it is true. The eye will be satisfied with seeing, the ear with hearing; all the senses will find full delight.

Paradise, whose simple remembrance inspired the saints of the old and new testaments with a universal contempt for all earthly goods, awakened in their hearts the most eager desires, and was the object of their continual sighs and longings.

Paradise, which is the masterpiece of the magnificence and omnipotence of God, the abode of his friends and favourites, the palace of the Incarnate Word.

Paradise, finally, where God will be seen in all his greatness and beauty, where God will be loved without division or interruption, where we shall share the very beatitude of God himself. O blessed vision, O love, O paradise, how glorious you are, how satisfying!

God promises me all these things, he promises me them for all eternity, provided that I love him. The more I love him, the more shall I be inebriated with the torrent of his delights. He only puts limits to his profusion because my too narrow heart puts limits to his love. May the greatness of the rewards he promises, the greatness of the punishment with which he threatens me, may heaven and hell shew me clearly

[1] I Cor. ii, 9, "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard," etc.

how precious my love is to God, and how ardently his heart burns for mine. Most loving and most lovable God! Hard and insensible heart of man!

II Point.

God has not been loved.

This hard and insensible heart is mine, and that of so many imperfect and bad Christians.

In vain does God reveal to us that the desire of our love burns in his adorable Heart; in vain does he offer with one hand the joys of the unspeakable delights of paradise, and with the other menaces us with the fires of purgatory and hell; we make no response to his desires; we are touched neither by threats or promises; we do not love him, or if we do, it is very imperfectly.

Is it love to forget him, to think of him but rarely? Is it love to offend him, to indulge our passions, to give ourselves up to their seduction?

Is it to love him as he deserves, as he desires, to divide between God and the world our mind, our heart, our cares and our eagerness, and in this division to give almost all to this earth, to what is passing and corruptible, and scarcely anything to God and to the things of eternity?

But maybe the earthly Jerusalem is more desirable, more beautiful than the heavenly? Maybe God, who has so magnificently adorned our prison, has neglected his own palace? Maybe the things he bestows on his enemies, on so many criminals and sinners, are preferable to those he has reserved for his friends and his saints? Perhaps this world promises and confers on us a happiness more stable and ravishing than that which God has prepared for us in his kingdom? But this is nonsense, common sense alone will tell us so.

What, after all, will it profit us to confess that there is an infinite gulf between the enjoyments of earth and those of heaven? What makes a true

Christian is neither his mind nor his tongue; it is solely his heart; it is the renunciation of the joys and pleasures of earth; it is death to all things created. How rare it is, and perhaps more rare than we think, to find such dispositions in Christians, even among those who make profession of piety! Yet we only live to God in the measure in which we die to creatures; we only live for heaven in so far as we die to earth. What then remains for us to do? Only to lament with the saints that *love is not loved*, that the consolations which love pours into a soul detached from earth, and the ineffable delights of heaven are despised; only to humiliate oneself, to be ashamed, to hate one's own heart, which has so often preferred the muddy waters of Egypt to the fountains of the Saviour, to those waters *springing up to life eternal*.[1] What! I am good enough for God, and God is not enough for me! God is content if I offer him my heart, but *when he offers me his, I am not content*! How great is man in the thought of God; how little is God in the estimation of man!

III Point.

Henceforth God shall be loved.

How long shall I remain plunged in the mire, content with joys and pleasures that are merely natural? God in his mercy has taught me their deceitfulness, instability and vileness. I was made by God and for God; God alone therefore is worthy to be my end. My soul is eternal: nothing but what is eternal ought to rouse my ambition, nor shall it do so in future.

Raised by my dignity as Christian above this world, *I am the offspring of God*,[2] *I am a partaker of the divine nature*.[3] I will scarcely deign to cast a glance on visible things, which are but transitory; my gaze shall be fixed on heaven.

Heaven, which the goodness of God still offers me in spite of my having so often neglected and

[1] Jo. iv, 14. [2] Acts xvii, 29. [3] II Pet. i, 4.

despised it, delights my heart and inflames it with love. This is not a mercenary love, it is not the thought of my own interest which awakes my desire; I long after heaven with a filial love, and for the sake of loving my God for his own sake. Among the multitude and abundance of blessings which heaven contains, I know no other delights than an ardent and eternal love for God, my Creator, my Benefactor, my Saviour, the only and necessary centre of my whole soul, my whole being. Life, which defers my eternal union with God, is a burthen to me; I need patience to support my load; death shall be the object of my desire. Death, so lovable and so desirable, when will you put an end to this dying life? When will you enable me to see my God face to face, to love him with a love no longer weighed down by this body of death, which shall no longer be subject to the distractions of earth, no longer variable and exposed to dangers and temptations? When shall I possess you, my God, and when shall I be possessed by you? When will this be, my God, when will this be?

Blessed inhabitants of so happy a country, draw me into your fellowship. Pray for me, that I may speedily join your happy company, to see God and to love him with you.

My paradise on earth shall be to have my conversation in heaven. I will dwell there in spirit, I will dwell there in heart, I will dwell there in desire, until that happy moment when I shall enter in very truth.

Prayer.

God of goodness and mercy, cut, prune and burn out of my heart entirely all that is not you, so that I may be able sincerely to say with the prophet: God of my heart, my God and my all, what is there on earth, what is there even in heaven that I desire out of you?[1]

[1] "For what have I in heaven? And besides thee what do I desire upon earth?" Ps. lxxii, 25.

SIXTH DAY.

First Meditation.

On the strength and domination which love exercises on the soul.

Prayer.

Holy Spirit, who dost work in those hearts which belong wholly to you so wonderful and desirable a transformation, receive the heart which I offer you, and which I place in your hands: fashion it as you will; root up and plant, take away and enrich, so that this wicked and perverse heart may become a good heart, a heart which, detached from earth, may fly towards heaven and be united with God, according to the degree of grace which you have prepared for it.

I Point.

The ravages of self-love.

What power is it that has frustrated the designs of God even for the angels, and for the whole human race? It is self-love, that irregular and disorderly love which the creature conceived for itself. It is that love which has utterly disfigured and ruined millions of beautiful and perfect spirits; which stripped Adam and Eve of the precious gifts they had so liberally received from the hand of their Creator; which has covered them and their posterity with utter confusion, and continues to bring down upon them untold miseries.

In order to destroy this detestable monster, to arrest the progress of this cruel tyrant, God has opposed to it the authority of his law, the promise of paradise, the threat of hell; he has opposed to it his poverty, his sufferings, his cross and his blood; but this proud tyrant, *strong even against God*,[1]

[1] Gen. xxxii, 28.

despises his law and his threats, tries to overthrow his cross, tramples under foot the precious Blood, and aspiring to the very throne of God, refuses, by the mouth of atheists and wicked men, to recognize him. It even obtains for itself from a multitude of persons the worship, homage, love and adoration which are due to God alone.

It is this monster which, taking many forms and a hundred different names, has given birth to all the heresies, abominable misdeeds, crimes and sins of the whole world, and which every day peoples hell with an innumerable multitude of souls which God had created for himself and which were redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ.

It is this enemy of all good which has ruined so many projects destined for the glory of God, which has destroyed and brought to nothing so many holy undertakings; which has robbed so many works of their merit, leaving no recompense to those who perform them but an empty glory in the eyes of men: which has spoilt and corrupted so many hidden virtues, and which, arising as it were from its own ashes, feeds itself on the very efforts made to destroy it. How difficult it is, says S Jerome, to be content with God alone, and to close so carefully all the entrances of one's heart that self-love can find no crack through which its poison can enter.

It is to this detestable self-love, my God, that I have been a slave all my life. It has infected my best actions; it has prevented my receiving an infinity of graces; it has soiled my soul with innumerable sins; it has continually aroused my evil passions; and if I have been vain, proud, envious, impatient, these are the fatal fruits of this fatal tree. Heart of my Jesus, lovable and fruitful source of all graces, inspire in me as great a hatred for my self-love as it deserves; a hatred at once sincere, sovereign, universal and eternal; make me a sharer in the contrition of the most illustrious penitents:

and you, holy penitents, help me with your prayers, and obtain for me the grace to weep every day of my life over all those faults which my wicked and disorderly self-love has caused me to commit.

II Point.

The admirable effects of holy love.

If I should speak with the tongues of angels and of seraphim, says S Paul, I could neither describe the victories nor explain the imperious strength of holy love. All are worthy of its origin, which is heaven, of its source, which is God, of its nature, which is a consuming fire.

If God is charity, as S John tells us,[1] he is also the first and the noblest victim of charity. A God conquered by charity descends from his throne into a crib; from his crib he ascends and dies upon a cross. A God, veiled and hidden under the sacramental species, become the food of men, wills to remain in this voluntary captivity as long as there shall remain a single man upon the earth. Love, this is your work; and if you had not subjected God himself to your law, never would you have succeeded in subjecting the unhappy children of Adam.

Love, having established its empire over the heart of God, has spread its ardour and its flames over the whole earth. It was this fire which burnt in the heart of those who peopled the deserts with an infinite number of innocent victims, immolated by the severity of incredible penances. It is this fire which burned in the hearts of more than twenty million martyrs who hastened with joy to the most cruel torments. It is this fire which consumed the hearts of a Teresa, a Xavier, and so many others who have undergone the long but most painful martyrdom of love.

What vice, what passion is there that love has not

[1] I Jn. iv, 8.

been able to uproot? What virtue is there that it has not persuaded, perfected and pushed on to heroism, in an innumerable multitude of Christians? In a word, love has formed for God a new people, a new earth, a new creation. Love divine, how sovereign you are! Your power is in some sort creative. There is nothing surprising in the fact that self-love has an infinite number of slaves; for that, it is enough to follow the inclination and bent of our own heart: but to give a man a new mind and a new heart, to change him entirely into a different being; to inspire an ambitious man with the love and desire of humiliations, a man of pleasure with a holy hatred of his own flesh and the spirit of mortification; to reveal the delights to be found in poverty, persecutions, and crosses, is not this the most difficult and astonishing of miracles?

But divine love has worked and still works such changes and miracles, in spite of the corruption of the world, in all ages, in all sexes and under all conditions, and it is by this transformation that we may know whether divine love rules in our hearts. For it cannot be idle, this love; and as soon as it enters into a soul it produces a new spirit, a spirit which no longer judges of things according to the standard of men and the false prudence of the flesh, but according to truth and the maxims of Jesus Christ; it gives a new heart, whose free and unconstrained affections have no longer any share in the corruption and low motives of the earthly man, but partake of the purity and nobility of the heavenly man. When our heart, which is the source from which our exterior actions spring, is under the direction of divine love, this love purifies our intentions and sanctifies the whole mass of our works; life becomes superhuman, celestial and divine. Lastly, as "*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*,"[1] it no longer takes pleasure in speaking of anything but God, its whole endeavour is to bring the whole world to the

[1] Mat. xii, 34.

love of God. Such is a man who is entirely possessed by love.

All-powerful love, which has worked this marvellous transformation in the saints, I offer you the chance to work one perhaps even more miraculous, and more likely to instruct and console sinners. My heart is full of defects; make of it a heart full of all the virtues. Far from hindering your operations in and around me, I promise you, I swear to you to-day an entire and perfect docility.

This is what you want from me, my dear and loving Jesus; it is also what I want from you. The extent of my misery is known to you: the abyss of my needs will draw down upon me the abyss of your plenitude. I ask this grace of you by the intercession of Mary and Joseph.

Prayer.

Holy Spirit, source of all true light and of holy love, enlighten my mind and enkindle my heart; work in me so complete a transformation that I may be able to say of you what S Paul, writing to the Galatians,[1] said of Jesus Christ: *I live; now not I, the Holy Spirit liveth in me.* Divine Spirit, reign in my heart; reign in it absolutely in time and in eternity.

Second Meditation.

The soul chooses divine love for her portion.

Prayer.

How happy was Mary's choice![2] The love which she took for her portion is the treasure of eternity. By the help of your grace, my God, I make the same election. Why cannot I do so with as much or even more love than she did? For you ought to be loved incomparably more even than she loved you. At least I desire to make this choice to the full extent of

[1] Gal. ii, 20. [2] Lk x, 42.

the grace which you will give me in order that I may love you.

I Point.

The necessity of a good choice.

Wisdom, in the eyes of men, consists in making a good choice of a career in life, and of taking the surest and most direct means to success.

Nothing is so important and so necessary as to be free from all illusion as to the end which we set before ourselves. If this end is evil, every step which we take towards it is vicious and criminal. If this end is worthy of the noble nature of man, the thoughts, projects and actions which are directed towards this goal partake of its merit.

Yet it is quite common for men to go wrong on this essential point. Why is this? Because in making their choice they consult neither reason nor religion, but only their senses and passions. Hence it comes that the world is full of vicious men and hell of reprobates.

Have I not need here to reflect on my past life? At every moment of my existence since I came to the use of reason I have acted for some end. What has this end been? Curiosity, self-love, vanity, temper, etc. And consequently, how many faults, how many sins? My God, forgive me.

When I have not gone entirely astray from the glorious end for which I was created, what efforts have I seriously made to reach my goal? What cowardice, what negligence in the use of those means prescribed to me by my religion! Here is a fresh subject for confusion and contrition. But true wisdom, my essential interest, my contrition if it is sincere, everything requires me to take my part seriously, to persevere in it courageously. So alone may I hope to attain my end.

II Point.

Resolution to take God and his love for our only portion.

The objects about which we have now to deliberate can be reduced to two, virtue or vice, paradise or hell, God or the devil; for under this last name are included the flesh and the world. Is there any possibility of serious deliberation here? No, without a doubt, unless I am either wicked or out of my mind.

At the hour of my death, when I am summoned before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, for all eternity, what choice shall I wish to have made?

Can I make a better one than that which God has made for me in giving me my natural being by creation and my supernatural being by regeneration?

What do the insults, sufferings, the cross, the precious Blood, the infinite love of Jesus Christ my Saviour, demand from me? My God, I will not hesitate; to deliberate would be a crime. In the sight of heaven and earth, angels and devils, at the foot of your cross, my Jesus, I choose freely and with deliberate judgement: for time and for eternity, I choose for my only portion the love of my God and my Saviour. Henceforth I will employ my understanding only in knowing and glorifying God, I desire life and strength only to consecrate them to his service, a heart only to love him.

It would be unjust, an injury to God, to suffer any division in my affections. Heart for heart, life for life, all for all, what can be more just and more necessary, especially when there is question of the relations of a creature with its Creator and Saviour? My heart is already, by its own nature, too narrow to love God as much as he deserves, to be able to repay him for the shedding of his Blood and his infinite love. Constrained, in my own despite, to be ungrateful, in some sort, I will not be so by my own choice.

I blush because even when I give you all, it is still so little, my God. *I am an unprofitable servant.*[1] But he who gives all can give no more; it is part of your greatness that your creature can never give you all he owes. Come then, love, come with your heat and your flames, burn and consume my heart, which is your victim. Come, love, pure and without taint of self-interest; love ardent and never growing cool; love continual and without variation or interruption; consuming love, which will destroy in me completely all that could wound the holy jealousy of my God; suffering love, which finds all its delight in suffering for God, until the day dawn when it will enjoy him for all eternity.

Angels of God, blessed dwellers in the kingdom of divine love, I invite you to share in my joy. My body only is on the earth, my mind and heart are already with you, joining with you in the praises of God. He is my portion, my inheritance, the only object of my desire. How happy and precious is my lot! Bless the Lord with me, that he has given me the wisdom to make so happy a choice, and that he arouses day and night in my heart ardent desires of doing and suffering all I can in order to enter with you into the possession of my God. And you, Blessed Lady, *mother of fair love*,[2] obtain for me from your dear Son the grace to live and die full of divine love.

III Point.

Examination of the resolution just made.

To strengthen myself in the resolution I have just made, it is important to foresee the obstacles which may hinder, or even entirely prevent, my carrying out the choice on which I have decided.

What then are these obstacles? Whence are they likely to come? From the devil, the flesh, the world, from human respect and from my own passions.

[1] Lk. xvii, 10. [2] Ecclus. xxiv, 24.

These are my most cruel enemies, the enemies of God. Henceforth I will hold them in horror, I will not so much as listen to their solicitations. They only flatter me in order to ruin me; under the sweetness of the honey they offer lies hid a deadly poison.

Yet after all, what inducement can the devil offer? Sin in this world, hell in the next. Get thee behind me, Satan; I renounce thee with all thy pomps and works, I will cling to Jesus Christ alone.

What can the flesh offer me? Pleasures worthy of the mud out of which they are fashioned, unworthy not only of my religion, but of my reason also. Animal and sensual satisfactions are the only gifts the flesh can offer; but I am something too great, I am made for too sublime an end to become the slave of my body.

What can the world promise? Much more than it can give. Were it faithful to its promises, could it heap up its goods upon me as if I were another Solomon, I should be forced to confess, as he did, that the agreeable intoxication which the world causes at certain moments leaves behind it in the soul nothing but pain and affliction, or at least a horrible emptiness.

The tyranny of human respect causes us every day to commit faults aginst our will, and to blush for the virtues we respect and love. Bad Christians, by their mockery and contempt, have done more harm to piety than any persecutors. This is all I have to fear, the railery and contempt of the enemies of virtue. I, who am bold enough to offend God, shall I tremble before these little earth-worms? Rather will I despise their contempt, preferring the esteem of holy men, of the saints and angels, of God himself. He alone is the judge upon whom my eternity depends.

Lastly, my passions turn by turn endeavour to usurp the mastery over my heart. If there were no God, if my material soul marked no difference

between me and other animals except in outward appearance, then I might as well give myself up to the desires of my heart; I could expect no happiness beyond this. But in this impious supposition, what an incomprehensible enigma I become! Reason is but a chimera; that interior feeling which makes me blush at the thought of vice is only an illusion; my unconquerable inclination towards happiness has been imprinted in me by a tyrant who only desires to see me unhappy, etc.

But where am I straying? There is a God, my soul is immortal, death for me is but the passage to eternity. Henceforth the passions of my heart are my most formidable enemies; God alone is worthy of my esteem, my love, my most eager desire; he alone, because he is eternal, can be my happiness throughout eternity; all my care on this earth ought to be to make myself worthy of him, by struggling against the world, the flesh and my passions. Behold me then, my God and my Saviour, strengthen more and more in me the choice which I have made, to be ever faithful to your love and to die completely to everything which may lessen it. Help me by your holy grace; defend me against your enemies and mine. Divine love, my choice, my portion, my all, possess my heart, close it to every other object, reign there alone, reign entirely, and never leave me again.

Prayer.

Witness and author of my choice and resolution, Jesus my love, make my whole life like to that of Magdalen in her cave. Do not allow me to live one moment without loving you with all my heart and to the full extent of your grace.

Holy lover, obtain for me the same graces which you received, I mean those graces which enkindled in your heart so ardent a love for our dear Jesus. I am sure you will hear my prayer, for it is most conformable to your desire to see Jesus Christ adored,

loved and served throughout the whole world. Amen.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On interior mortification.

PRAYER.

Of all the miracles worked by your grace, my God, the most astonishing is that which destroys self-love in man, and creates in him a holy hatred of himself: this transformation is especially the work of your right hand. I understand its necessity, but I understand also all the difficulty involved. So I will never cease to say with S Francis: Teach me to hate myself, that I may learn to love you.

I POINT.

The necessity of mortification.

If man were born in original justice, his passions would be submissive to reason, and his reason to God; consequently, he would be able to practise all the virtues belonging to his state without any resistance and without having recourse to interior mortification. But since original sin has caused the passions to revolt against reason, the indispensable necessity of spiritual circumcision may well find, and does indeed find a great deal of resistance in our hearts, but it should not find any in our understanding.

What child of Adam is not forced to renew the confession of Job: My God, why dost thou permit me to be continually in opposition and contradiction to your divine law?[1] It is entirely spiritual, but as for me, in heart and mind I am a fleshly man. Who does not, like the great Apostle, experience in himself the interior rebellions which excite the mind and the flesh? Who does not groan under this body of sin and death? In this conflict between my darkness and your light, O my God, between my low

[1] Job vii, 20.

and grovelling inclinations and the noble and sublime maxims of your holy law; in this contradiction, which penetrates even to the marrow of my soul, how can I be united with you, how can you unite yourself with me? To form this union, which alone can make me holy and happy, ought you to become like me, proud and haughty as I am, sensual and fleshly as I am, a lover of the earth and of all perishable goods, as I am? This is absolutely impossible. Therefore, supported by faith and aided by grace, I must transform myself into you; taking hold of the sword of mortification I must crucify and destroy this body of sin with all its concupiscences; I must strip myself of the inclinations of the old Adam and clothe myself with those of the new, who is my guide and my model. Self-renunciation is then the principle, the rule and the measure of the progress and advancement of the soul in piety: it is this happy death to self which begins, perfects and consummates a spiritual, supernatural and divine life in us. *In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make.*[1] My God, let me never lose sight of this admirable maxim. Besides containing in itself the science of salvation and perfection, it shews me the cause of the difference I notice among Christians. Some, although they are members of Jesus Christ, have no share in his spirit, but live just like pagans: they entirely neglect self-mortification. A great number of others, in spite of so much to help them, both interiorly and exteriorly, live lives which are very imperfect, and in no way worthy of the holiness of their vocation, because they spare themselves, and take little pains to mortify their evil inclinations. But it is those who, like generous soldiers of Jesus Christ, make continual war against themselves, who are fervent, perfect and saints. *In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make.*[1]

[1] Imitation, Bk. I, ch. xxv.

Further, it is upon self-abnegation, as to a common centre, that all the points of religion converge; all cry out to us: He who does not hate his own life cannot be the disciple and member of a Head crowned with thorns. In truth, Jesus Christ, this poor, humiliated and suffering God, is the model of which every Christian ought to be a living copy. The spirit of Christianity is a spirit of renunciation and death to all that is visible. Grace, which is our strength and the life of our supernatural actions, has its source on Calvary, and leads there those hearts which are docile to its inspirations. The sacraments were instituted to arm us in the combats of the Lord, they give us heavenly and divine strength. The rewards and punishments which God has prepared for us in a future life have been revealed to us to sustain and animate us in the war we have engaged in against our enemies; man's most cruel enemy is man himself, his own treacherous heart. In a word, the one object of religion is to destroy in us the old man, that it may form in us the new. In consequence, not to take in hand the sword of spiritual circumcision is to annihilate in us all religion; only to employ this salutary sword rarely and half-heartedly is to hold religion captive, to render it almost useless. Here we have matter for self-condemnation.

Yes, Lord, if this saying: *Renounce yourself*, be your own executioner, is so hard, how much more terrible will be the sentence: *Depart from me into a fire which shall never be extinguished.* This motive is good, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit: yet a much more noble motive impels me generously to embrace mortification: it is the one means of carrying out the choice I have but now made, of destroying self-love and of substituting the love of God. In the practice of this I shall meet with many difficulties; your example, Jesus, will sustain me. It was to help me that you allowed fear, weariness and sorrow to invade your own soul. The victory opened your

veins and caused the blood to trickle down upon the ground. How eloquently this blood speaks to my heart. If, to destroy my self-love, to root out my vicious inclinations, it should be necessary to shed my own blood, I am determined to follow you in the path of mortification.

II Point.

Mortification must be universal.

It is not some portion of ourselves, it is the whole man which is infected and corrupted by sin: we must therefore destroy and renew the whole man by interior mortification. Our senses are as gates by which a thousand fancies enter the imagination, a thousand thoughts come into the mind which trouble the soul, excite the passions and even sometimes cause its death: we must therefore make a compact with our eyes and ears, so as not to see or hear anything that can soil the mind or heart. The tongue is also an instrument of sin, an unquiet evil, almost impossible to tame; our mind is scarcely less depraved. What indulgence do we not shew towards ourselves, what harshness towards our neighbour: How rashly do we undertake to penetrate his most secret intentions! What pride and confidence in our own talents, real or imaginary, what obstinacy in keeping to our own opinion!

Who can number the multitude of passions which have established their throne in the human heart, and have changed it into an abyss of malice, whose depth can be sounded by God alone? Certainly, a complication of maladies is not necessary to cause death. Only one unrepaired leak is sufficient to sink a vessel: only one unmortified passion exposes us to danger, and may, should any occasion arouse it, be the cause of our eternal loss. Happy those who ever live in fear and distrust of themselves, who strive

with a good will to mortify themselves, and to renounce themselves in all things.

But if it is necessary to make war on all our passions, especially is it so with that which we call the ruling one, whether it be intellectual pride, love of pleasure, desire of the goods of this world, or anything else. Why are so many lights and graces useless to us? Why are so many prayers and communions fruitless? Why are there so many people professedly pious, but so few really spiritual? The reason is that few labour to destroy the "old man" entirely, and do not keep a tender spot for their predominant passion. We immolate to God all that is worthless in the spoils of Amalec,[1] but spare all that is precious; we touch our dearest failing very lightly, and as long as these tares remain in the field of our heart, it will stifle most of the good grain which divine grace has sown there to little purpose.

Shall I then, my Saviour, be content to give you only a part of myself? You are all mine; I can be all yours. Shall I be so ungrateful as not to desire it? So unfaithful as to wound that delicacy of love which will suffer no robbery in the holocaust?[2] Dear Lord, even when I have given you all, what is a man in comparison with God? I can only attain to your love in so far as I hate myself; I can only be enriched with your Spirit in so far as by self-renunciation I am stripped of my own; you will fill me with your gifts and with yourself in the measure with which I empty myself of creatures and of all that is earthly.

It is nothing but an ardent desire of belonging to you, of being entirely yours, yours without reserve, which has inspired me with the resolution of losing myself absolutely that I may find you perfectly. Happy loss, which makes me possessor of the sovereign good!

[1] I Kings xv, 19. [2] Isaias lxi, 8.

III Point.

Mortification must be continual.

If it would suffice to mortify ourselves, even in everything, but only for a few months or years, the path to heaven would not be so difficult nor the gate by which we enter so narrow. But no: continual war, no truce with self.

In this place of exile, this valley of tears, the ground of our hearts, whatever care we take to clean it, is always fruitful in weeds, continually cropping up again. So we must be always cutting, always uprooting. Our passions may indeed be deadened by the slow process of spiritual circumcision, but they are not entirely rooted out. Weakened and submissive, they easily yield to the domination of a strong, robust will, but they are still alive, and by their solicitations seduce the consent of the will. Thus *the life of man upon earth is a warfare*,[1] and to watch, pray, deny ourselves, these are at all times indispensable duties. We carry the treasures of divine grace in earthen vessels:[2] the more fragile the vessel, the more precious the treasure it contains, and the more must we redouble our precautions.

The devil prowls round us incessantly, always watching for occasions of suprising us and making us fall into sin. We should follow his example, and learn from him incessantly to watch over ourselves and to mortify ourselves continually.

Virtue will never be preserved and perfected except by the same means by which it was acquired; that is, by self-abnegation and self-renunciation.

Lastly, what will it serve, according to the saying of the Holy Spirit, to build with one hand and destroy with the other? What use is it to wash our garments, and to soil them again immediately? To fast to-day in penance for a fault which we commit

[1] Job vii, 1. [2] II Cor. iv, 7.

again to-morrow? Or what good is it to renounce oneself in moments of sensible devotion, at the end of a retreat, at the sight of a sudden death, or some such occasion, only to relax again at once? One single day of liberty given to our inclinations often strengthens them more than the captivity of several days may have subjected them.

Lastly, if it is true that not always to go on and advance in the path of justice is to fall back and lose ground, what are we to think of the vagaries of so many people who seem constant in nothing but their inconstancy?

Prayer.

My Jesus, I have vowed myself to you, to be yours, all yours, nothing of my own; self-abnegation shall be my constant employment every day and every hour. To carry on this war which I have undertaken for your love, I need the help of your grace: I expect it confidently from your goodness and love for me. Amen.

SEVENTH DAY.

First Meditation.

The love of Jesus.

Prayer.

May your love, Lord Jesus, destroy in me all desire of seeking anything else but you and your interests; may it inspire me with a holy hatred of myself; may it so perfectly and entirely possess my whole being that I may henceforth live only in you and for you. Jesus alone in my mind; Jesus alone in my heart; Jesus alone in my mouth; this shall be my motto.

I Point.

Jesus is utterly lovable.

When the Son of God wished to make himself loved by men, he could find no more direct or compelling means than to become like them by taking a human nature that he might *draw them all with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.*[1] In this mystery of the Incarnation he united all that was most lovable in God and man, all that could win our hearts, whether in the kingdom of grace or of nature. Jesus is truly man, but the most perfect and winning of men. *Grace is poured abroad in his lips,*[2] and the beauty of his face exceeds all earthly beauty. In this beautiful body dwells the most beautiful soul that ever was created. Jesus is gentle, humble, patient, charitable, kind, generous; each of these qualities he possesses in an eminent degree. On this point it is enough to realize that his body and soul were destined and embellished to form a worthy sanctuary and temple for the Divinity. My Jesus,

[1] Osee xi, 4. [2] Ps. xliv, 3.

how incomparably lovable you are, even in your natural and human perfections! Divine grace, because it is a supernatural thing, far surpasses in value, beauty and splendour, all that is merely natural. It deifies all the virtues; it raises them to a height which astonishes our weak reason; it alone has the power of forming the most beautiful and attractive characters. What is there so lovable as a gentleness which nothing can disturb; a charity which is only wounded by the sorrows of others; a humility which yields in everything except what is burthensome; a zeal which despises dangers and difficulties, even death itself, to come to the help of a neighbour. These and so many other virtues, although divided among the saints, and possessed in a limited measure by them all, have yet won them the esteem, admiration and love of the whole world.

But there is no division, no sharing of grace for Jesus. The fulness of the Holy Spirit, the plenitude of his gifts are poured out upon him. Possessing all virtues in a degree of perfection incommunicable to a pure creature, he joins to these gratuitous gifts, the gifts of knowledge and wisdom, the gift of miracles, discernment of spirits, prophecy, etc. My Jesus, those who do not love you, or who love anything out of you, cannot possibly know how infinitely lovable you are.

Under the veil of his humanity Jesus hides his divinity. He is *God of God, light of light, true God of true God*; he is wise with the wisdom of God; holy with the holiness of God; powerful with the power of God; beautiful with all the beauty of God; without question, he is as lovable as he is perfect. Ah, my Jesus, said S Bernard, I feel that my heart is no longer mine, it flies to you, it clings to you, it desires to unite itself to you, it longs to love you alone.

What shall I say now of the glory of Jesus, at whose Name heaven, earth and hell bend the knee; of that glory which he has enjoyed from all eternity

in the bosom of the Father; of that glory with which he is crowned, according to the expression of S Paul, in recompense and reparation for the insults and ignominy of his passion; of that glory which the blessed soul of Jesus possessed from the first moment of its creation, proceeding from a clear and intuitive vision of the Divinity? In the mystery of the transfiguration he allowed a ray of this glory to be seen. S John, astonished, assures us that it was so brilliant that it could only proceed from the only-begotten Son of God; and S Peter, beside himself, seemed even to forget the delights of Paradise. How many wonders are united in the person of Jesus?

My Jesus, how lovable you are! Lovable for all the gifts of nature which have made of you the Creator's masterpiece!

Lovable for all the perfections of grace; from this plenitude all men have drawn as from an inexhaustible fountain.

Lovable for all the infinite perfections of the Divinity, which dwells in you substantially.

You are worthy of infinitely more love than you do or ever can receive from men and angels: their hearts are too small to love you as you deserve.

II Point.

Jesus the lover.

So many perfections, created and uncreated, do not make Jesus either proud or disdainful. If he is infinitely lovable, he also loves us with an infinite love; and the more he loves us, the more lovable he is. Love naturally produces and essentially requires a reciprocal love. The love of Jesus has been an eternal love; from all eternity he has offered himself to ransom man, while from all eternity he consented to the reprobation of the rebel angels.

His love is ardent, and knows no reserve. It has devoted to us every thought of his mind, every move-

ment of his heart, all his footsteps, all the moments and all the mysteries of his mortal life; even now, it still devotes to us every moment of his Eucharistic life on our altars and of his glorious life in heaven.

His love is patient, waiting for sinners in spite of their ingratitude and their crimes; it seeks them wth kindness, receives them with gentleness, pardons them with liberality, and asks of them nothing but their hearts.

His love is incomprehensible. Yes, Jesus has loved each one of us with a love greater than that of all mothers and fathers put together for their children, than all the angels and saints together have for God himself.

His love is devouring. The flames of love with which the Sacred Heart of Jesus was inflamed were so consuming that at every moment of his life they would have caused his death had not his divine power preserved his life.

His life is infinite: for at the Incarnation it gave us a God for the salvation of the world; on the cross it sacrificed his life for the redemption of the human race; in the Sacrament of the altar it gives him to each of us, gives him to us every day; in heaven it destines him to be our portion and our eternal inheritance. Rich as he is, has our God any gift greater or more valuable than himself to bestow?

My Jesus, how lovable you are! My Jesus, how tenderly you love! If you were not infinitely lovable in yourself and for yourself, you would be infinitely lovable because your love is infinite.

Loving heart of my Jesus, heart all fire and flame, how is it possible that you have not yet melted the ice of all our hearts? An infinite love has an infinite power over the heart of the one loved. Are we then capable of a resistance and obduracy of infinite duration? No. Yet there are unfortunately but few who seriously endeavour to know Jesus, to enter into

the secrets of his heart, to know what he is in himself, and what he is in our regard. And if we do not know him, is it any wonder that we do not love him?

III Point.

Jesus is loved.

Jesus infinitely lovable; Jesus infinitely loving; is this Jesus loved?

Yes, without a doubt, yes. The eternal Father himself declares to us that Jesus is *his beloved Son, in whom he is well-pleased*:[1] he commands his angels to adore him; he decreed the mystery of the Incarnation principally that the Word might be loved by all creatures: he loves mankind only in Jesus and for Jesus.

Jesus is loved by the Holy Spirit, who descended to earth to give testimony to him, and who pours out his gifts on all sides, that he may form Jesus in our minds and our hearts. This love of the Father and the Holy Ghost for Jesus is a love which is necessary, eternal and infinite, the only love worthy of Jesus.

He is loved by Mary his Mother; and in the heart of the Blessed Virgin there is more love for Jesus than in the hearts of all other creatures.

He is loved by the angels and the blessed. Heaven is nothing else but love for Jesus, continual love, ineffable love.

He is loved by all the just upon earth, by all hearts of good will. They are only good because they love Jesus; the more they love, the better they are.

But have I loved him, this infinitely lovable Jesus, infinitely loving and infinitely to be loved? How often have I offended and contemned him!

My Jesus, how is it that you still love a creature as despicable, unlovable as I am?

My heart, how can you not have loved one so lovable as Jesus? How could you determine to

[1] Matt. iii, 17.

offend your most powerful, faithful and tender Friend?

Still more, how it is possible that after so many offences, so much indifference, Jesus again opens his arms to me, longing to press me to his Heart? Shall I not cast myself into this Heart, burning with love; shall I not cry out from the depth of a heart broken with shame and sorrow: Pardon, Jesus, pardon for all the past?

In future I desire to love you as you are loved by the just on earth, by the saints and angels in heaven. I will love you with the heart of Mary, your most worthy Mother; I will love you with the love of your Father and the Holy Spirit. At least, my Jesus, I offer you all the love which creatures bear you, and the three Persons of the adorable Trinity. I rejoice to think that you will be for all eternity infinitely lovable, infinitely loving and infinitely loved.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Enlarge the capacity of my heart by your holy flames, and fill it with a love at once ashamed and aspiring. Ashamed at having so often offended Jesus and of having loved him so imperfectly; aspiring to the desire of loving him ever more and more. The only measure I wish to observe in loving, as says S Bernard, is to go beyond all measure.

Second Meditation.

On the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Prayer.

By that infinite love with which you have loved us, divine Saviour, grant me so lively a faith in your real presence under the Eucharistic species that my gratitude and my love may, if it is possible, be equal to a benefit so unspeakable and so incomprehensible. Amen.

I Point.

The love of Jesus for men in the Eucharist.

All the mysteries of the mortal life of Jesus, his incarnation, his sufferings, his ignominious death upon a cross, are surely incontestable proofs of the infinite love with which he loves us. Still, in all of these, his love was in a certain manner restrained and limited; it is only in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, says the Council of Trent,[1] that he bestows with liberal and unbounded profusion the abundant riches of his love. Everywhere lovable, everywhere loving, this appears transcendently in the Sacrament of the Altar. Let me explain.

At the last supper which Jesus ate with his Apostles, his Heart seemed to be divided between two affections equally strong and equally vehement, and which appeared incompatible. His love for his Father called him back to heaven; his love for mankind detained him on earth. He could not consent to live any longer separated from his Father; neither could he consent to forsake men, whom he loved more than life itself.

How could he reconcile these two loves? It needed infinite wisdom to find out a way; to carry it out, nothing less than infinite power. Infinite love to will it; infinite power and wisdom to put it into execution.

At this last supper, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of his Body; by this means he satisfied the two loves which seemed to divide his Heart. He is at one and the same time in heaven with his Father and on earth with men. O admirable invention of love! It teaches me that in very truth does Jesus find his delight in dwelling with us men on earth, and that all the glory of heaven cannot satisfy his Heart if he cannot possess it without separating himself from

[1] Sess. xiii, cap. 2.

us. What a prodigy, what an abyss of love is here!

But perhaps, as during his mortal life, Jesus will limit his presence to only one favoured spot? No, his love suffers no such restrictions or limitations. His love multiplies his presence in all countries of the world, in every church of the same town, in order to content the immense desire he has of being with us.

Perhaps Jesus has lent himself to the earth for a few centuries only? Again, no. The love which has made Jesus a captive under the sacramental species will retain him on our altars as long as there shall be men upon the earth. But will not man respond to such love by a faithful response? Alas! without speaking of the blasphemies of heretics, the sacrileges of so many unworthy Christians, Jesus, by willing to remain with us always and at all times, exposes himself to receive, even from us who profess to love him, little but ingratitude, indifference and neglect. You foresaw, dear Lord, the full extent of our ingratitude, but this did not prevent you from carrying out your design; you only listened to the promptings of your love, a love more astonishing and moving our hearts more profoundly just because they are so unworthy of it.

It is this love which determined you to unite yourself so intimately with us that you are, in a sense, incorporated into us and we into you, almost as two pieces of melted wax become indistinguishably mingled into one.

It is this love which continues to work all the miracles which take place at the moment of consecration. The substance of the bread and wine is destroyed; their accidents subsist without any substance to sustain them. The Body of Jesus Christ, without ceasing to be in heaven, is present on the earth in a thousand different places; it is contained entire in every appreciable particle of the Host.

If anyone could have a mind capable of understanding, a heart large enough to experience all these

marvels of love, would he not become beside himself in an ecstasy of admiration, gratitude and love; his only delight would be to remain at the foot of the altar; he would live and die there, meditating on the abyss of love which is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and immolating himself as a victim to repair the insults which Jesus receives in the sacrament of his love.

Is it possible, my Jesus, that you have loved me to such excess, and that I love you so little? Henceforth make me all love for you. I ask this through the infinite love which induced you to institute for me the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist.

II Point.

The ingratitude of men towards Jesus in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, love gives Jesus whole and entire to every communicant; would it not be right, and even infinitely right, if love should induce each communicant to give himself wholly to him in return? But what a difference there is between what we ought to do and what we actually perform; between the way Jesus treats us and our treatment of him!

Taught by faith, we know that his Body is our nourishment, that his Blood is our drink, that he has an immense desire to be our daily bread; yet how many have no desire for this delicious manna. But the loving Heart of Jesus forgives even this ingratitude.

What is it that keeps away souls of little faith? Too often a temporal affair of little importance, a trifle, a mere nothing. Or at least they know that to receive Jesus they must endeavour to live more piously, to mortify themselves in earnest. But they find this too great a price to pay for the honour of possessing God. If I act thus, have I not reason to fear that having rejected Jesus Christ during life, he will reject me after my death? Those many

Christians whom he would perhaps never have seen at his table, if they were not obliged by the law of the Church to approach, how will they dare to appear before him? How will it be with them if the very days set apart for preparing by confession and other exercises for the heavenly nuptials are spent by them in sin and dissipation? To what purpose is it to believe as a Christian and to live as a pagan?

We receive Jesus, we eat his flesh, but how? Without preparation, out of custom, human respect, because it is more respectable, the proper thing to do; sometimes scarcely distinguishing It from ordinary bread.

We receive Jesus, but how? Can it be believed that among Christians some may be found who receive him, like Judas, in mortal sin, with full consciousness of their state, or at least with a reasonable doubt which they dare not examine? If the love of him who is thus outraged did not hold back their vengeance, the angels themselves would annihilate such monsters.

But how do we treat this God of love when we have received him? How many times, instead of these sentiments of gratitude and love which should fill our hearts, instead of shewing our maladies to our kind physician, we give ourselves up to dissipation. Scarcely do we give a moment's thought to the presence of Jesus Christ, as truly in us then as he is at the right hand of his Father.

How many times, perhaps, there has been no difference in your conduct on Communion days from others; the same resistance to grace, the same tepidity in works of piety, the same habitual failings. You carry in your breast a furnace of love, yet you feel no warmth from it.

Perhaps even the day on which Jesus Christ has honoured you by coming into your heart, you shamefully drive him out, giving place to the devil by mortal sin. How can such abominations be possible?

Is the priest more religious than his people, does he give Jesus Christ the honour he ought? Does he offer every day the Victim immolated for the salvation of the world, whose mediator he is before God? Does he bring to this adorable sacrifice the necessary dispositions, whether remote or immediate? Does he draw from It for himself and for others the fruit which God intends?

When we contrast the goodness and patience of Jesus Christ with the ingratitude and infidelity of men, we wonder whether love and mercy could go further, or the crimes and outrages of men sink lower.

And you, hidden and holy souls, of whom the world is not worthy, faithful lovers of Jesus Christ hidden under the sacramental species, by your ardent supplications put a stop to our disorders. But for myself, humiliated, ashamed and contrite for all the faults which I have committed against this divine sacrament, I know no greater sorrow than that of being deprived of this food. I will use all possible diligence to prepare for my God the dwelling of my heart, and to profit by his presence. Love keeps him amongst us; love shall keep me close to him; it will induce me to visit him frequently and to prolong those visits as much as I can. The same love shall draw my thoughts and desires to this *tabernacle of God with men*[1] when I am unable to visit him; and if I cannot follow in person the priest who carries Jesus to the sick or in procession, my heart at least shall accompany him. My whole desire is to return Jesus love for love.

Prayer.

My Jesus, grant me the true spirit of those associations which have been established to adore you day and night, and to repair the outrages which you receive in the blessed Sacrament. I unite myself in spirit with all those holy souls who now adore you

[1] Apoc. xxi, 3.

and who in years to come will adore you in spirit and in truth on our altars. Through their minds and hearts I may in some sort perpetuate my homage and my love, my sorrow that I have loved you so little, or rather, that I have so often grieved and wounded you in this astonishing mystery of love.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER.

Holy Spirit, illuminate my mind with the abundance of your light, enkindle my heart with the fervour of charity, that I may be able, with all the saints, to know and love the *length, breadth, height and depth*[1] of the love with which I am loved.

I POINT.

The Holy Spirit is given to us.

How great is man in the eyes of God, how dear to the three adorable Persons of the Blessed Trinity! The Father and the Holy Spirit have loved the world so much as to give it the Eternal Word by the Incarnation; they have loved each one of us so much as to give us as food the Word made flesh. The Father and his Word have loved the world so much as to give it the Holy Spirit, the personal love of the Father and the Son.

This second gift, considered in itself, is not and cannot be as great as the first. If, however, we view it with all its attendant circumstances, it is a greater benefit to us even than the other; Jesus Christ himself assures us of this.

The Incarnation is a general and universal blessing given to the whole world, without exception of person: but the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, which S Luke calls the fruit of the

[1] Eph. iii, 18.

glorious ascension of Jesus Christ, is a privilege reserved for Christians only, or rather for the just under the law of grace.

How glorious to us is this kind of incarnation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts! It is the first degree of our adoption: it makes us truly children of God, brothers of God, living and animated temples of the adorable Trinity: it makes us spiritual men, and even in some sort deifies us. By this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, says S John, we are born of God himself, we are gloriously re-created in Jesus Christ:[1] consequently, he who is least in the kingdom of heaven, that is to say in the church of Jesus Christ, a newly baptized child, is greater than S John the Baptist himself.[2] How blind and gross is the pride of men; they are puffed up with contemptible trifles, and have no esteem for that which is their true glory.

What blessings has not Jesus Christ bestowed on us in giving us his Holy Spirit? The fruitful source of all the light and grace which are poured down from heaven to earth, he teaches all truth;[3] he teaches it in one moment; he teaches it to all kinds of persons, of every shade of character. What an astonishing difference we see between the Apostles while they are still in the school of Jesus Christ and these same Apostles baptized by the Holy Spirit; they are entirely new men, and Jerusalem in amazement no longer recognizes them. Happy are those whom the Holy Spirit teaches in his own special manner; faith makes us believe what we do not see, but the Holy Spirit, by the gift of understanding, makes us in a sense to see that which we believe; by the gift of wisdom he imparts to us a marvellous relish for the maxims of the gospel, for all the teaching of Jesus Christ; by the gift of fortitude he makes what was before bitter, sweet and agreeable, he makes that easy which at first sight appeared impossible. Holy

[1] John i. 3; Eph. ii. 10. [2] Mt. ii. 11. [3] John xvi. 13.

Spirit of God, this is the admirable transformation which you so often have worked and which you cease not still to work in the souls of those who abandon themselves to your guidance.

You descended on earth for me as much as for the saints; for me, as much as for them, you are a Spirit of light, of truth and of strength; you have as great, perhaps even a greater desire to establish your kingdom in me as in so many other souls in whom you have formed Jesus Christ himself. Justice compels me to acknowledge this. How often have you desired to open my heart by your graces and lights; how many times have I not saddened you by my reserve? How many times have I extinguished you, by extinguishing the first sparks you have enkindled in my soul? My own worst enemy, by closing upon you the door of my heart, I have deprived myself of the greatest of all blessings, I have done myself the most terrible of injuries. Neither the sufferings nor the merits nor the infinite love of Jesus Christ are of any profit to me unless I possess you, unless you cleanse my soul of error and create in me a clean heart like to the Heart of Jesus Christ. Author of all graces, Father of lights, Spirit of fortitude, God of mercy and of all consolation, pardon me all the sins by which I have offended you; chase away the darkness of my soul with your admirable light; instead of my cowardice, fill me with invincible courage in obeying your holy inspirations and making all the sacrifices you ask. Would anything cost me too dear if I realized the infinite value of the gift to be acquired?

II Point.

How to prepare our heart for the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit desires to contract with our souls a marriage which shall be spiritual, heavenly and divine; he longs to dwell in them, to establish his

abode in them. But this admirable union cannot be formed without our co-operation. In what does it consist?

(1) Esteem and desire for the gifts of God are usually the first disposition which he requires of a soul before bestowing them. *I wished and understanding was given me*:[1] *Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it*;[2] our heavenly Father grants the desires of those who pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the author of all blessings. With what fervour and perseverance should we not beg for a gift so precious! Let us then incessantly implore the Holy Spirit, with all the energy of our being: Come, Father of lights, who sheddest on faithful hearts those heavenly rays which reveal to us all truth, which do not produce a barren and sterile knowledge, but make the soul love and relish those truths which you have unfolded to it. Come, admirable Consoler: either blunt the thorns of life's path; or if you judge it more for our good to leave them, make us love to feel their smart. Come, Spirit of fortitude: sustain the weakness of our flesh against the sufferings which attack it, and against the labours which are inseparable from the practice of solid virtue. Come, Creator Spirit, heavenly and divine fire: enkindle our hearts with the fire of holy love. If these desires ascend from a sincere heart, it is the Holy Spirit who prays in us and with us, and we can have no more certain proof of the speedy accomplishment of our desires. God only inspires them in order to fulfil them.

(2) To prayer, let us join purity of heart. Happy are those hearts which possess it, *for they shall see God*;[1] the esteem which they have for the purity of their conscience is a pledge of the benevolence and tenderness with which God regards them. But we must strive to prepare within us a dwelling worthy of the Spirit of infinite sanctity and purity; we must

[1] Wisdom vii, 7. [2] Ps. lxxx, 11. [1] Mt. v, 8.

cleanse with care the habitation of our heart and purify it from all that could displease so great a guest: *dulcis hospes animae.*[1] Remember, Christian soul, that the holy Spirit is more easily wounded than you perhaps think. Too natural an attachment to the bodily presence of Jesus Christ was, according to the interpretation of some of the Fathers, an obstacle to the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles. Above all, tear out, uproot, utterly destroy pride: the Spirit of truth cannot dwell side by side with the spirit of falsehood.

None the less, when I tell you to tear out, uproot, destroy and build, I know that it is the work of God alone to prepare his tabernacle and to change a fleshly heart into a sanctuary worthy of him. The Holy Spirit, says the Psalmist, is the Father of the poor and needy: first he draws them out of the *mire of dregs*,[2] then little by little he raises them to the rank of *princes of his people*,[3] that is, the perfect. Let us co-operate constantly with him and he will complete the work which he has begun in outline, and which he will consummate by consuming in the fire of his love the rust of the old Adam, our vices and passions. Let us beg this life-giving Spirit to pour into all the faculties of our soul, our imagination, understanding and will, the vivifying principle of a new and heavenly life.

(3) To reach the age and plenitude of the perfect man, the last disposition necessary is great courage. The Holy Spirit cannot possess you entirely without first destroying you entirely, and he cannot destroy you except by crucifying you. More piercing than a two-edged sword, he penetrates even to the division of the soul. He divides it and separates it, as it were, from its body, by inspiring hatred and aversion for it: he divides and separates it from itself, if I may so speak. For this jealous Spirit will

[1] Sequence for Pentecost. [2] Ps. xxxiv, 8. [3] Ps. cxii, 8.

not suffer that a soul which he desires for his spouse should seek any support or find any sweetness in creatures: he holds it suspended, in a manner, between heaven and earth, so that it receives consolation from neither. Still more, he afflicts it, he torments it, he crucifies it interiorly in a thousand ways by the various painful trials to which he subjects it in order to detach it from itself and purify it entirely.

It is impossible for anyone who has not experienced it to understand how the Holy Spirit thus transforms a soul. Sustained interiorly by his power the soul, by means of this continual and total death to all things created, attains to the only true life which is God himself, but God sought, desired and loved for himself alone. In the privation of all consolations it finds its sweetest consolation; in the loss of all things, the possession of an inestimable treasure. *Forsake all and thou shalt find all.*[1] Yes, Christians, in order to prolong this perishable life, so full of miseries, you are ready to submit to the surgeon's knife or the cautery, you will face anything; but when it is a question of forming within you a heavenly and immortal life, the life of God himself, of transforming you into his image and of becoming one spirit with him, then the very thought of so difficult an enterprise terrifies you and holds you back.

Divine Spirit, source of every grace, neither the necessity of continual and fervent prayer, nor the generous and total mortification by which purity of heart is acquired, nor the interior martyrdom by which you prepare a soul to receive your communications, none of these shall extinguish or even cool down the ardent desire of possessing you which you have enkindled in our hearts. We know that the more severe in appearance your treatment of a soul, the more full is it of tenderness and kindness; that

[1] Imitation.

you multiply the joy and consolation of such a soul in proportion to the suffering into which you have plunged it, the wounds you have inflicted on it, and that one moment of pure and heavenly delights is abundant recompense for all its pain. But your consolations are less to be esteemed than your gifts; it is yourself, it is you alone who are the object of our desire.

Come then, Holy Spirit, either descend upon us or draw us up to yourself. Come to us and dwell with us during our time of exile; for you are our possession, the heritage which Jesus Christ has promised to sanctify those whom he has redeemed, and to complete the great work which he has inaugurated.

Come to us. Is our heart too small to possess you? Expand it by the ardour of your love. Does it still cling to inclinations and attachments which offend your pure eyes? You are a consuming fire; change our heart into a sanctuary worthy of yourself: God alone can prepare a dwelling worthy of him.

Come then, Holy Spirit; fill our hearts. Already you have penetrated them with keen sorrow for having resisted so often your holy inspirations, your unwearied research, your efforts to establish your kingdom within them. You shall no longer find any resistance in us; reign absolutely and continually in our hearts: they need you alone, they desire you alone, they long for you alone.

Come, thou divine fire, pure and infinite charity, so that having possessed you during life, we may also possess you after death. Thus we shall pass from one fire to another, from one love to another; from the love which is enkindled here below by grace to that love which in heaven your presence will render constant and unchangeable. There we shall dwell continually in the furnace of divine love; all other employment ceasing, we shall be all fire and all love in the sweet and eternal flames of Paradise. Divine

Love, when shall we come to enjoy this incomparable happiness?

Meanwhile, we desire with ever renewed ardour to possess you more perfectly. We will love you with such fervour and perseverance that at the moment of our death there shall be nothing to postpone the beatific vision and love of the adorable Trinity, which loves us with an inconceivable and infinite love.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Form, I beseech you, in my heart those desires to which you always hearken and which you will infallibly fulfil. The more perfectly I shall possess you, the more ardently shall I desire you; the power of these new desires will cause you to descend upon me with fresh abundance: thus I shall pass my whole life in desiring and receiving. Amen.

EIGHTH DAY.

First Meditation.

Of the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Prayer.

Your love of us, my Saviour, has made you like to us; our love for you, if it is sincere, ought to make us like to you by the imitation of your virtues. For love either finds or creates a resemblance between the persons whom it unites. The virtues in which you specially wish me to imitate you are your humility, your poverty of spirit and heart, your patience and obedience. I realize how necessary these virtues are to me; I feel also how difficult they are to my corrupt nature: but what can resist the power of love? I ask them of you by the love with which you love me.

I Point.

The Incarnation exhorts us to humility.

God died on the cross to redeem me; he lived on this earth as man to instruct and teach me. His death is my ransom, his life my model.

The first lesson which he has taught me by deeds before inculcating it by words is that of humility; never, surely, was there a master better qualified to teach it. And as there is nothing so great and so elevated as God, so there can be nothing so calculated to confound and destroy our pride as the humiliations of God. God Incarnate! God clothed in the form of a slave! the Word made flesh! Here we have humiliation infinite, substantial, eternal, and this is the remedy which God has prepared for our pride. If this malady of the soul cannot be cured by

the self-abasement of a God, it is indeed absolutely incurable.

Infinite humiliation. Between God and a creature, no matter who or what, the distance is infinite. Yet if God had united himself hypostatically with an angel or a seraph, we might think this sufficient abasement and condescension: but when he espouses the clay from which our flesh is formed, when he takes it with all its weakness and misery, when he chooses it in a state of utter abjection, I mean in the womb of a human mother, then God could not descend to annihilation more universal or more profound.

Substantial humiliation. When calumny attacks one who is innocent and covers him with its foul insinuations, he remains what he was before: the imputations heaped upon him have no foundation outside the blind passion of his enemy, and the humiliation is purely exterior. In truth, the Incarnation effected no change in the Eternal Word: yet, in consequence of his personal union with our humanity, the weaknesses of man became his own; the Eternal was truly and really born in time, the Impassible became subject to suffering, the Almighty became weak, etc. Therefore, because these imperfections are attributed and applied to the Word himself and that quite legitimately, it is said of him that his humiliations are substantial, very different from those of one who is falsely accused.

Eternal humiliations. Always and for all eternity will the Word remain personally united to a human nature. Throughout all eternity it will be true to say that God has been poor, mocked, despised, and that he died on the accursed wood of a cross.

At the sight of this self-abnegation of the Word the soul of Jesus Christ conceived immense and inconceivable desires of humiliating itself in order to equal, if possible, by the self-abnegation of the humanity that of the divinity. The wrongs which

the Man-God was to suffer during the course of his life, and especially during his Passion, could not content the hunger which devoured him. But the humiliation which he endures in the Blessed Eucharist has a kind of proportion to the abasement of the Word, and is to some extent an infinite humiliation. Here the Sacred Humanity could not be more completely veiled, hidden and eclipsed. And again, what has It not suffered, what does It not still suffer at the hands of heretics and of so many Catholics who receive unworthily the Body and Blood of their God? Eternal humiliation. It has lasted nineteen centuries and will endure till the end of the world. Substantial humiliation. The flesh of Jesus Christ reduced to the condition of food has lost a part of its natural qualities and the use of the senses, according to the common opinion of theologians.

Love of the Heart of God, love of the Heart of Jesus, double principle of that abasement which I adore! make my mind know, my heart feel its power, its worth and its glory.

God humbled and abased, the Man-God meek and humble of heart, and only seeking deeper abnegation, is not this a miracle truly divine? But myself, who have come forth from nothing, who am but dust and ashes, who am degraded by sin below the devils themselves, for me to be proud, is not this a miracle truly diabolic, according to the expression of a holy doctor: *miraculum diabolicum.*

Shall it continue, this miracle of the blindness of my mind and the corruption of my heart? No, Lord. The first virtue in which I will imitate you is humility of heart; the second is again humility: the third is the same humility. It is the key to your most precious treasures, the root of all virtues. I will seek you, my Jesus, where you are truly to be found, that is to say in self-annihilation; there do I desire to live and die in your company.

II Point.

The crib is the school of poverty.

Let us go to Bethlehem, let us consider attentively what is taking place there; let us prepare our minds to receive the lesson it teaches.

The child whom we see is God, the absolute master of heaven and earth, who holds our future in his own sovereign power. What has he chosen for his own portion? Riches? No. By despising and rejecting them he has made them odious and despicable to every truly Christian spirit. But he has consecrated and in a manner deified poverty by choosing it for his inseparable companion in all the circumstances of his life. In revealing to us this hidden treasure, could he be deceived, could he deceive us as to its value?

Again. To what degree of poverty did the Man-God subject himself? To a poverty most indigent and necessitous. He was born, not in a palace but in a stable: he was laid, not in a cradle but in a manger: he was without light in the darkness of night, without fire in the severity of winter cold, he had no company but that of brute beasts.

His poverty was not only indigent but even humiliating. It was his poverty which closed against him the inns and houses of Bethlehem; it was his poverty which after procuring him a thousand insults led him into a cave which was the usual shelter of a few poor animals.

To what humiliations, to what sufferings did not poverty expose Jesus Christ during the flight into Egypt, during the hidden life and during the years of his preaching!

What has reduced the King of Glory, the Creator of the universe to a poverty so indigent and so humiliating? Not necessity; not the danger of

riches, for they could have none for Jesus Christ; it is esteem and love of poverty, the desire of teaching us and making us know what are truly blessings and what are real evils.

What light, what strength does not faith find in this example of Jesus Christ! It has undeceived and disabused a host of persons; it has made them despise sceptres and crowns; it has persuaded and still persuades every day many rich people to embrace evangelical poverty; this example alone has produced even in the world many who are poor in spirit, possessing much yet having nothing as their own. But with shame I must ask myself what effect has it had on my mind and heart, this spectacle of a God poor and needy? If I desire the comforts and conveniences of life, if I complain even when I lack what appears necessary, can I tell you, my Jesus, that you are my only treasure, that you are my God and my All? Yet for the future I want to be able to use such language with all sincerity. Can I be truly a Christian in heart if I despise what my God has esteemed, if I fly from what he loved and cherished? Poor and destitute, I desire to follow Jesus, who through love for me stripped and despoiled himself of everything.

III Point.

The life of Jesus Christ teaches me obedience.

Destroy self-will, says S Bernard, and there will no longer exist either hell or purgatory; for sin will no longer exist. The world owes its ruin to self-will, by the disobedience of the first Adam; the world owes its salvation to the obedience of the second Adam.

He has himself told us by the mouth of one of his prophets: *At the head of the book* in which are written the details of my life *it is written of me that*

I shall do thy will, my God.[1] He tells us again in his Gospel: I am come down from heaven; why? Was it to do my own will? No, but to carry out that of my Father who sent me.[2] This divine will he has engraved in the depth of his heart; he made of it his continual nourishment. He has carried out his Father's designs for him to the very last jot and tittle. When ready to consummate his sacrifice he said to his apostles: All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man.[3] And on the cross he added: My mission is accomplished, all is completed, *all is consummated.*[4]

Let us learn from Jesus to submit our wills constantly and perfectly to the will of God, however severe it may seem to be. Let us also learn for God's sake to submit our will to that of those creatures who are, in regard to each one of us, his lieutenants and interpreters.

Is it not wonderful enough to see God submissive and obedient to his own creatures? But who were those whom he thus obeyed? This is a truth which we can never sufficiently meditate.

If Jesus has only submitted himself to Joseph and Mary, this would have been enough deeply to touch our pride. And indeed, admirable and perfect as they were, yet in knowledge, in power, in dignity, were they not infinitely inferior to Jesus Christ? But he has not thus limited his obedience. He submitted to pagan princes and infidels; to Augustus, at whose command he went to Bethlehem; to Herod, who treated him as a madman; to Pilate who condemned him. He submitted to the high priests, to the Pharisees, to the Roman soldiers, even to his executioners. He looked upon all his persecutors as the tools of divine Providence: penetrating the veils of

[1] *Cf.* Ps. xxxix, 8, 9. [2] Jn. v, 34; Mt. v, 18. [3] Lk. xviii, 31.
[4] Jn. xix, 30.

passion and injustice, he saw only his Father, and respected his authority in the most manifest misuse which has ever been made of it by false zeal, envy and rage.

Lastly, how far has he carried his obedience, asks S Paul? He humbled himself, *becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross;*[1] He has preferred to lose his life, adds S Bernard, rather than to lose obedience.

O man, who art but dust and ashes, be confounded for your pride. He who is infinitely great humbles himself to the dust for love of you, submitting to his own creatures and even to his persecutors. You refuse, on the contrary, to submit to the most legitimate authority; by exalting yourself above your fellows who are the instruments of divine Providence, or to whom a share in the divine authority has been committed, you resist your Creator himself.

My divine Lord and Master, I acknowledge with shame the truth of this charge. Never again will I be guilty of so crying an injustice. The obedience of Jesus Christ shall teach me, it shall confound and destroy all the vain excuses of my pride and give the death-blow to my self-will. Henceforth obedience shall be dearer to me than life itself.

Prayer to Jesus Christ

Most perfect model of humility, poverty and obedience, root out of my heart the vices contrary to these virtues, which are the distinguishing character of your true disciples; impress, engrave so deeply in my heart these grand virtues that ceasing to live by the spirit of the old Adam, I may begin to live by yours alone. Is it indeed truly to live, to live by any other spirit than yours?

[1] Phil. ii, 8.

Second Meditation.

Jesus suffering.

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

My resolution to imitate you in your humiliations, your poverty and your obedience, will not be sincere and will always remain without fruit, if I do not learn from you to love and to carry the cross. For the multitude of your tender mercies, grant me, I beseech you, this excellent knowledge, so rare yet so necessary to a Christian, that I may be able to say with all sincerity, as did your apostle: *I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*[1]

I Point.

The number and variety of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaias gives us a true impression of the sufferings of Jesus Christ when he calls him the Man of Sorrows, *Virum Dolorum.*[2] And indeed, is there anything which he has not suffered? Or is there any part of his body or any faculty of his soul in which he has not suffered?

This universal Victim suffered from everyone: from Jews, from pagans, from priests and people, from his judges and his accusers. Among his apostles, one sold him as a slave, another denied him, all abandoned him. The same sword of sorrow that pierced the heart of his blessed Mother at the foot of the cross, pierced also that of her Son; each was to the other a source of cruel agony. God the Father himself did not spare Jesus Christ, but treated him as if he were sin itself, says S Paul. *Him who knew no sin, he hath made sin for us.*[3]

[1] I Cor. ii, 2. [2] Is. liii, 3. [3] II Cor. v, 21.

Look upon the body of Jesus hanging on the cross. From head to foot there is no spot whole or free from pain. His body, after the cruel scourging, is all one big wound; his hands and feet are pierced with nails; his head is crowned with thorns; his eyes are livid; his cheeks defiled with spittle, and swollen from blows; on the faces of those around him his eyes read nothing but hatred and rage; his ears are filled with the curses, blasphemies and murderous cries of a whole mob possessed by all the furies of hell.

Let us enter into the soul of Jesus. There we find that the sufferings of his elect, the blood of his martyrs, the persecutions of his Church, the loss of an infinite number of souls bought with his blood, pierce with a thousand swords that heart so tender and so full of love for us.

Consider attentively how much Jesus Christ loves you. He it is who sends you all the tiny crosses which come in your way, from whatever quarter. If you kiss the hand which offers them you console him in his sorrows; if you murmur and rebel, you add a fresh sorrow to the sorrows of Jesus.

How often have I not thus wounded you, my Saviour; from to-day I will try to be your consolation. Taught by your example, sustained by your grace, I say to you from the depths of my heart what you said to your Father in the Garden of Olives; I renounce this natural will that has such a horror of the cross; I submit my rational will to yours. Yes, my Saviour, yes, may your holy will be done. Out of all the evils in the world I make exception only of sin which you do not and never can will; I accept all the rest which bears the seal of your divine will.

To carry out this resolution, grant me, I beseech you, so much love that, however great my sufferings, however multiplied my pains, I may be always ready to suffer yet more for you, as you were ready and disposed to suffer even more for me, if need were.

II Point.

The greatness of Christ's sufferings.

He who weighs all things in the scales of justice and equity has defied us, by the mouth of his prophet,[1] to find elsewhere suffering like to that of Jesus Christ.

Was any slave ever subjected to so cruel a scourging? Strong, vigorous soldiers, urged on by the fury of the Jews, succeed one another, striving to outdo each other in barbarity. More than five thousand blows lacerate the tender body of this innocent victim; shreds of flesh are torn away, blood streams on every side, the very bones are exposed to view. Must we not acknowledge the enormity of those crimes which had to be expiated by such unspeakable butchery? *According to the measure of the sin shall the measure of the stripes also be.*[2]

What shall I say of the ignominy of the diadem which served Jesus Christ as a crown? What intolerable pains were caused by the thorns, their points driven in by heavy blows, those points which pierced his temples, opened his veins and penetrated even to the brain. I cannot describe the rest.

But the interior sufferings of Jesus Christ surpassed all understanding. To realize them one would have to be endowed with the mind and heart of Jesus: his mind, that one might know as perfectly as he did the respect due to the infinite majesty of God, the enormity of sin; his heart, in order to love as ardently as he did both God and men. Here is an abyss beyond the power of any human intelligence to fathom. All that one can say is that his interior sufferings, as great as the malice of sin, as great as his love for God and men, pierced his heart with mortal sadness and sorrow. But if every sin rends so pitilessly the heart of Jesus, what a sea, O my

[1] Lam. i, 12. [2] Deut. xxv, 2.

God, what an ocean of sufferings is formed by the infinite number of sins and crimes of the whole world! Only the Man-God could have endured such an excessive weight of sorrow.

What he asks of you, Christian soul, is that you should, with him and for him, when occasion arises, swallow some drops from the chalice which he drank in its entirety for love of you and for your example.

My Lord and my God, cries S Bonaventure, when I consider with how many heavy crosses love has burthened you, I can no longer live without the cross. If you are pleased with my service, for reward I ask for crosses; if you are displeased with me, revenge yourself by sending me crosses: however it may be, the cross is the object of my desires. Humiliations, poverty, suffering, the cross, these are the destiny which God the Father, the eternal Word and the Holy Spirit prepared for the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, the inheritance which that humanity received with a willing heart. Can there be any destiny more glorious or more advantageous? Does our faith allow us to desire any other?

III Point.

The duration of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Most Christians imagine that the Passion of Jesus Christ lasted only a few hours, or at most a few days. They are mistaken; his whole life was one continual martyrdom.

The certain knowledge of humiliations and cruel sufferings which are about to befall us makes us anticipate the pain they will cause; a criminal over whom has been read the sentence of a shameful death thinks of nothing but the terrible end awaiting him. The soul of Jesus Christ from the first moment of its creation was united to the Word, and saw in the light of God all that it had to suffer. From that moment all the blows and scourges, the nails, the

cross, all these objects of shame and sorrow were continually before the eyes of his mind.

It is true that he accepted them with pleasure and joy, and because his immense love for God and for us made him find pleasure in suffering, he willed, says Tertullian, to content and satisfy this insatiable desire by undergoing innumerable pains and humiliations. Therefore at each moment he suffered all together those things which actually he would only endure one by one, and at the end of his mortal life: at each moment he suffered the same sadness and agony which seized him in the Garden of Olives; and if the same effects did not appear exteriorly it was because by his divine power he chose to suspend and prevent them.

Further, if the heart of a S Paul was penetrated *with great sadness and continual sorrow*[1] at the spectacle of those of his brethren who brought condemnation on themselves by their obstinacy in rejecting the truth; how much more was the heart of Jesus Christ, that heart which is nothing but love and charity, incessantly pierced with mortal sadness at the sight of so many crimes against God and the loss of so many souls!

We cannot then understand the excessive sorrows of Jesus Christ; still less can we understand his excessive love for us. However multiplied, however mortal, however continual his sufferings, they were not enough to content the burning thirst of his love. S Chrysostom tells us that he would willingly have consented to remain fastened to the cross until the end of the world and to suffer for each one of us what he has suffered for us all.

My Saviour, arm me with the continual remembrance of your sufferings, that I may learn to esteem and love the cross. Ashamed at my cowardice I prostrate myself at your feet and I make the resolution, by the help of your grace, to suffer for love

[1] Rom. ix, 2.

whatever you shall send me and for as long as you please.

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

Grant me, by the infinite love which you have for me, grant me these graces which I beg in order that I may follow thee along the path of suffering: —

More humility than humiliations,
More patience than sufferings,
More good will than good works,
More love than action,
More abandonment to all things than abandonment of all things. Amen.

Third Meditation.

The excess of love for men which Jesus Christ has shewn in suffering for them.

Prayer to the Eternal Father.

By immolating your only-begotten Son you have manifested the excess of charity which was hidden in your heart. Your design in thus manifesting it was to conquer the hardness of our hearts, to excite in them a lively gratitude and to enkindle a tender and ardent love: this is also the only thing I ask of you, and I will never cease to ask it all the days of my life. By the abundance of your lights and graces, accomplish in me this your design and my desire; grant me understanding and love of the truths I am about to meditate.

I

Nothing is so strong, nothing so imperious as love, says S Bernard. Either it is ashamed of the very word difficulty or, if it finds repugnance, it loves its repugnance, it loves to suffer and to immolate itself for the object of its love. If then you want to

imitate Jesus Christ and to follow him along the path of poverty, humiliation and suffering, you have nothing else to do but love. But how can we enkindle in earthly, sensual hearts a spiritual love, a love all heavenly, the love of Jesus Christ? The surest means is often and attentively to meditate upon the excessive love with which he has loved us and which he has manifested in suffering for us. It is this immense love which has enkindled in the hearts of the saints those furnaces which consume and devour them.

II

To suffer for anyone is to love him more than oneself; to die for another is to love him more than life itself. So it was not only on Calvary that Jesus loved me; his whole life was nothing but a continual exercise of love for me, for it was never free from suffering. He loved me in his nativity, in his circumcision, in his flight into Egypt, in his hidden life, etc., and everywhere he loved me so much that he appeared to hate himself.

III

The more one who suffers for another is superior to him in dignity, in majesty, the more touching and affecting does that love appear. Jesus suffers, and suffers for me. Who is he? What am I? Here are two abysses neither of which is it possible to fathom; the one of greatness, the other of vileness. Jesus Christ is the Creator of heaven and earth, God of God, equal to and consubstantial with his Father, the King of Glory, the immortal King, the Prince of the kings of the earth, the first-born of all creatures, the judge of the living and the dead, the necessary object of the adoration of men and angels. I am but a worm of earth, ashes, dust and nothingness; yet it is for me that love has immolated Jesus. What a marvel, what an excess of love! an excess

which can only be measured by the infinite distance which raises God above us.

IV

If a creature of nothing has nothing which can make him worthy of love, yet it is possible for it to make itself positively unworthy to be loved. I have been a rebel, armed against God; in my rebellion I have attacked God, I have rashly tried to dethrone and annihilate him, and in his place I have set myself as an idol, that is, a favourite passion for my mind and heart to adore as their divinity. Thus I was God's enemy; I deserved his hatred, his vengeance, hell itself. Perhaps a loving heart might consent to die for a friend,[1] but to die for one's enemy, to be the one offended and to repair the offence, to be able to avenge oneself on the guilty party and instead to put oneself in his place, to make oneself a victim for him, only the heart of God is capable of so astonishing a love.

V

At least the Word Incarnate would have spared his sacred humanity, when taking upon himself to avenge our sins against himself? Surely he would be content with the least possible satisfaction? No indeed; since there were no limits to his love, he would put none to the insults and sufferings to which he would expose himself. His love, more cruel than his executioners, advances and anticipates the moment of suffering and condemns him, in the Garden of Olives, to a mortal agony more intolerable than all that the rage and fury of his enemies had prepared for him. The more cruelly the love of Jesus causes him to treat himself, the more incomprehensible it is and the more it merits all the love of our hearts in return.

[1] Rom. v, 7.

VI

But why this excess of humiliations and sufferings? Jesus Christ is God; consequently one tear, one sigh, one word would have been of infinite price and merit, and would have sufficed to blot out the sins of a thousand worlds. This is true; yet love, when it devours a heart, is insatiable. Again, for the perfect redemption of mankind, it was not enough merely to appease the divine justice and to reconcile God with man; it was necessary also to destroy his evil passions. Here one abyss attracts another abyss, no less profound. The excess of our pride demanded an excess of humiliations; our passion for riches could only be healed by the most necessitous poverty; our thirst for pleasure by the crushing weight of the crosses and the greatness of the sufferings of our physician. All these remedies were then necessary for us; the hardness of our hearts, which still resist in spite of his example, justifies only too well the wisdom of the choice of Jesus and his conduct. Let the Jew cease to take scandal at the poverty, the humiliations and the cross of God our Saviour; let the Gentile and the sinner cease to treat as madness the adorable wisdom of the cross. In their folly they measure the heart of God by the narrow limits of their own. They are blind, says Tertullian, they cannot see that these states of abjection were necessary for our perfect restoration; that henceforth they become worthy of God.[1] Why? Because there is nothing more worthy of God who is our Father than tenderness and compassion for his unhappy children, that is, there is nothing so worthy of God as the salvation of man.[2]

VII

It sometimes happens that the strongest have

[1] Vulnera nobis necessaria: ac per hoc jam digna Deo.
[2] Quia nihil tam dignum Deo, quam salus hominis.

need of the weakest, and the strength of kings consists in the number of those whom they can call to arms to defend their rights. But God, who is the plenitude of all good, cannot have any need of his creatures; neither the justice of the just nor the iniquity of the sinner can add anything to or take anything from his majesty, power or happiness. The love of Jesus Christ for us is then gratuitous, disinterested, and it is in the goodness of his own heart alone that we should seek the reason why he has so loved us and hastened to our assistance. God loves me, a miserable little worm; he loves me, a sinner; he loves me with a perfectly gratuitous love; he has loved me so far as to suffer for me innumerable injuries and sufferings; is it possible then that I shall not love him in return?

VIII

Yes, the love of Jesus Christ for us is so perfectly gratuitous that he has reserved for himself only the sufferings, leaving to us all the advantages of the redemption. What should we have been without Jesus Christ? What are we now through Jesus Christ? Both are incomprehensible, and in eternity alone shall we come to understand these things. I was sold to hell; still worse, to sin; now I am the friend of God, his kingdom is my country. I was the slave of the devil, now I am the son, the brother, the living temple of God, I had forfeited all blessings, and now I am enriched with every sort of grace; these treasures of God belong to me as his heir, the co-heir of Jesus Christ. Oh, how much has Jesus loved me! At what cost to himself has he delivered me from all these evils, procuring for me instead untold blessings. What must be the stony hardness of my heart if I do not ardently love Jesus Christ!

IX

What does Jesus Christ claim from us in return for so many tokens and efforts of a love without parallel? All that he asks is that we love him in return. Yes, to possess our hearts was the only desire of Jesus praying, weeping, suffering and dying. If we will open to him our hearts, he is satisfied, he is content; if we close them against him, he is angry, he threatens. How strange it is to see this eager longing on the part of God and then to contrast it with the little desire we have for him in return. How great an esteem has God for man; at how low a price does man compute God! Let my heart at least, my God, never be guilty of this malice and stupidity.

X

Finally, if in spite of all these proofs of love, a human heart still resists him, Jesus Christ, this passionate lover, does not yet absolutely reject and repulse it; he seeks it, he solicits it in a thousand ways, he implores it to return to him. If this heart continues to resist, Jesus continues his patience and long-suffering. As soon as this same heart sheds one tear of sincere sorrow and conceives one spark of true love, Jesus runs to it, he embraces it, he caresses it and heaps upon it his benedictions. Is not this love, so patient, so eager in seeking wanderers, so easily appeased after years of neglect and scorn, is not this love, I say, the most touching, the most attractive that can be conceived?

Prayer.

Heart infinitely lovable, infinitely loving, communicate to mine the heat and the flames of yours; inspire me with a pure and disinterested love, a generous and suffering love, a burning and consuming love, a love, in a word, worthy of you. Amen.

NINTH DAY.

First Meditation.

On Crosses.

Prayer to the Eternal Father.

Grant us so sincere a love and esteem for crosses that after the example of your dear Son we may accept them with our whole heart for your glory, that we may carry them in the same spirit as he did, and that like him we may willingly live and die on the cross.

I Point.

The cross is one of the most precious gifts which God can bestow upon any of his creatures.

How can we love crosses, how carry and embrace them lovingly unless we know their worth and advantages? Let us endeavour to gain this knowledge, so useful and even necessary to a Christian, from the truths proposed in the following meditation.

1. The Man in Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ considered as man, is the cherished and well-beloved Son of the eternal Father; he is necessarily the object of the complacency of the adorable Trinity. Now, what destiny did these three adorable Persons prepare for the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ? Poverty, humiliations, the ignominious death of the cross. Surely, either God was mistaken in the choice which he made for the *Son of his Love*,[1] as S Paul calls him, or else we must acknowledge that the cross is a precious blessing, a blessing worthy of the Son who received it, worthy of the Father who bestowed it: for whom would he reserve his most precious treasures if not for Jesus Christ? *And for whom shall be all the best things.*[2]

[1] Col. i, 20. [2] I Reg. ix, 20.

2. With what feelings did Jesus Christ regard the cross? His heart was hungry for humiliations; and impatient, so to speak, to be baptized in his blood, he suffered from the delay. Not content with the martyrdom prepared for him, he anticipated it in some sort, and devised for himself one that was far more bitter. What Jesus Christ received with such respect and love should surely be accepted by those who profess to be his followers with gratitude and a holy pride.

3. Honours, riches, the satisfaction of the senses, these Jesus Christ leaves to the world; let them enjoy them; but his friends and favourites he treats as his Father treated him; as the greatest token of his love he has left them his cross; whenever he honours anyone with special affection, like his holy Mother and the apostles, he distinguishes them by crosses heavier than those of others. How clearly this shews the inestimable value of the cross; at the same time, how few study this lesson, even among who make profession of piety!

4. The more crosses God prepares for anyone, the greater also the lights, graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which he bestows upon them. For our *God is faithful*, says S Paul, *will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.*[1] In proportion as God heaps upon any soul a great abundance of graces, does he destine that soul for a more eminent glory in eternity. Grace is the principle of everlasting glory. What is there more precious for time than grace? What is there more precious for eternity than glory? Cross, grace, glory, these, O my God, are your most excellent gifts, the most precious presents you can bestow upon your creature.

Precious cross, holy cross, I realize to-day how wrongly I have hitherto regarded you. I was afraid of you, I fled from you, I had a horror of you; in my blindness I thought you were a proof that God was

[1] I Cor x, 13

angry with me and had abandoned me. But now I look upon you as the lot of God's favourite children, as one of the most precious gifts that can come to me from heaven; penetrated with this thought, I esteem you, I love you, I embrace you with all my heart: but I do not deserve to possess you, my infidelities and sins have made me unworthy of you.

II Point.

The cross is the most pleasing offering that man can make to God.

1. Man himself is the first and most essential victim which he owes to his Creator and Saviour: all others, either those which the Jews of old offered in their Temple or those which Christians offer on their altars are substituted in the place of men, and are the protestations of a heart which desires to immolate itself to the glory of God. But when and how is man truly a victim offered to the glory of God? Incontestably, it is when, imitating the meekness of a lamb, he maintains a religious silence under the shears which despoil him of his fleece, that is, of his goods, his reputation, or whatever it may be. Touch a man in his most sensitive part, the apple of his eye, and all the natural feelings of his heart revolt against the cross, especially against humiliations.

If on your side, my God, the cross is one of the most beautiful and precious gifts which you can make to your creature, on his side his resignation to your holy will in all things, his acceptance of all the crosses you choose to lay upon him, is the most perfect and agreeable sacrifice he can offer for your acceptance.

2. Lively faith, firm hope, well-purified love, entire self-renunciation, in a word, all the most

eminent virtues combine to form the disposition of a Christian who says to God in all sincerity: Strike me, Lord, as you judge best: employ whatever instrument, whatever hand you please, I submit myself in all obedience to your blows: *I am ready for scourges.*[1] And if he is able to add that he lovingly kisses the hand that strikes, that all his joy and all his pleasure is to suffer for Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ; if his only complaint is that God spares him too much and does not drive the sword into the very marrow of his soul; this is the most excellent miracle and wonder of the most High; this is a man of whom the world is not worthy and who by the sublimity of his ideas and the heroism of his virtues gives immense glory to God.

3. Jesus Christ, receiving humbly the bitter chalice, drinking it to the dregs, is the greatest and most pleasing sacrifice that the Man-God himself could offer to his Father. In this state he is the admiration and astonishment of the angels, he is in a special manner the object of the Father's complacency. Consequently, a Christian who draws from the sacred Heart of Jesus Christ respect and love for poverty, humiliations and crosses, is, by conformity of mind with Jesus Christ, the admiration of the angels and the joy and glory of God.

How sad it is that the science of the cross is so rare among the disciples of a crucified God! Many follow him with pleasure to Thabor, few accompany him to Calvary. Many apply themselves with devotion to prayer, to meditation, to exercises of Christian piety; to the frequentation of the sacraments and almsgiving they add abstinence, fasting and voluntary penances; but how few there are who receive with submission and respect humiliations and crosses which are not of their own choosing! Whoever has not learnt from Jesus Christ esteem

[1] Ps. xxxvii, 18.

and love of the cross has learnt little or nothing in the school of this divine Master. But he who has put on the true spirit of Jesus Christ looks upon the cross as the most precious present he can receive from God, and which he can offer him in this world.

It is you alone, my Jesus, who can teach me this sublime science: it is to make myself proficient in it that I desire to pass my life in studying the sentiments of your divine heart.

III Point.

What is the cross?

It is from our own heart that we learn to know and to discern the cross. Yet it will not be out of place here to enter into some detail in order that the faithful soul may make its resolutions more practical and more extended.

Properly speaking, the cross consists of two things; either the privation of what satisfies its natural inclinations or else the presence of something which troubles and mortifies them. These two arms of the cross may be varied in a thousand ways, and there is no one who has not some taste of them.

Without speaking of those crosses suitable to carnal souls, how great is the anguish of a spiritual man who passes suddenly from lights, consolations, feelings of tender piety into darkness, aridity and dryness; who feels in himself no stirring of devotion or faith or love; what a martyrdom he experiences if, in addition to all this, his imagination is troubled by a thousand importunate phantoms, his will distracted by opposition to all that is good, his soul afflicted and weighed down by mortal terror and by the weight of the anger of God, who appears to him as an angry judge.

This bitter cross, unalleviated by any consolation, throws back and discourages the weak and cowardly.

On the contrary, such a loving and sorrowful martyrdom has inconceivable delights for a soul deeply rooted in the faith of the *Man of Sorrows*. Let all my consolation, cries such a one, be to have no consolation on earth. This life is not the time to enjoy, but to suffer. Jesus Christ my Love was not only crucified outwardly but still more inwardly. For my sake he deprived himself of all feeling of divine consolation, he knew what it was to be abandoned by his Father, and he delivered his soul up to mortal agony. My joy and glory shall be to be like him and to carry with him and like him some small portion of this interior cross.

My Jesus, you measure your crosses to the strength of those who fight for you. All that I can say is that I submit myself to all that you will for me. For love of you I accept with respect and as a token of your love all the crosses you shall send me as well as all those which shall come by your permission. My desire is that the rest of my life shall be an interchange of love between us. You will give me crosses; I will embrace them with all the love of which you shall make me capable; if you do not think me worthy of the martyrdom of blood, grant me that of the cross on which I wish to live and die, fastened by the nails of love.

O Jesus! O cross! O love; this shall be all my portion in this world.

Prayer.

My Lord, it is you who have inspired me with these desires, fulfil them whensoever you please. Grant me to know the desires of your sacred Heart. May the desire of your Father's glory and yours, and of my own salvation keep me ever firm in the intention of receiving with pleasure all the privations and suffering which shall happen to me.

Second Meditation.

The cross is the triumph of love.

Prayer.

Divine love, all-powerful love, you who have triumphed over God himself and submitted him to your laws and your empire, when will you triumph completely over my heart? This, it seems to me, is the height of my desires and my most heartfelt wish.

I Point.

Jesus on the cross is the triumph of divine love.

How generous is the love of God for men, how immense! Love has drawn us out of nothingness, love has preserved us, day by day, by the ministry of creatures, love has provided for our necessities and even for our enjoyment.

Not only did love preserve Adam from the miseries natural to our condition as men, such as sickness, death, the blindness of ignorance and the rebellion of concupiscence, but it also enriched and ennobled him from the first moment of his creation, enlightening his mind with the brilliancy of a heavenly illumination and sanctifying his heart by the infusion of supernatural grace. All these blessings were bestowed upon us in the person of our first father; they would have been transmitted to his most remote posterity if his disobedience had not reversed the order established by the divine bounty.

It is love, says S Paul, which has created angels to minister to our needs, which has appointed them to guide us, to defend and protect us, to be our intercessors and mediators with God.[1]

[1] *Cf.* Heb. i, 14.

All this is great; all this is astonishing and marvellous. But there is an unheard-of prodigy of love still more incomprehensible. *God so loved the world*, says S John, *as*, for its sake, *to give* up to the death of the cross *his only-begotten Son.*[1]

A God! A worm of earth! And that God nailed to the cross for that despicable worm! No created intelligence can fathom these three abysses, whose depth is known to God alone.

A God! This is the first abyss, but an abyss of greatness, majesty, independence and plenitude. This great God, conquered by his love, gives his only Son, his eternal Son, immense and infinite like himself, equal and consubstantial with himself. On his part, God the Son, in like manner overcome by his own love, gives himself with joy; he descends from the throne of his glory, he abases and annihilates himself in the womb of a Virgin; and taking the form of a slave, he becomes in all things like to us, sin excepted.[2] O love of the Father and of the Son, as inconceivable and as infinite as the gift it offers. We can only estimate the first by the value of the second. *God so loved.*[3]

A worm of earth! Here is a second abyss, but an abyss this time of vileness, indigence and misery. Yet it is to this miserable worm that the Father has given his only Son. He gives him to his enemies, to men whose ingratitude and falseness he perfectly foresees; to sinners whose delight is to dishonour him; to heretics who labour to destroy the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to so many sinners who blaspheme his mysteries; to atheists who, blinded by their passions, deny his divinity in their hearts. It is you alone, my God, who could conceive such an excessive charity, a love so disinterested and generous. *God so loved the world.*

Lastly, God on the cross for this miserable criminal! This third abyss is one of justice and

[1] Jn. iii, 16. [2] *Cf.* Heb. iv, 15. [3] Jn. iii, 16.

mercy combined. One drop of blood, one tear, one sigh, a single word uttered by the Man-God would have paid superabundantly all our debts and satisfied the divine justice; but it was the Father's will that to deliver us from malediction he should himself be made a malediction, being made a curse for us,[1] so that subjecting himself to the suffering and ignominy of the cross, he was treated as sin itself.[2] *He spared not his own Son.* It is S Paul who assures us of this. You desire, my God, to reveal to us the abyss of eternal and infinite charity with which you have loved us.

O Cross, you say to my heart, in a manner at once eloquent and touching: *Behold how he loved.*[3] See how thy God has loved thee! The more incomprehensible in all its circumstance his love is, the less pardonable are thy ingratitude and obduracy. Love, but love ardently a God who has loved thee without measure.

II Point.

Man on the cross is the triumph of love.

What did not Abraham do for God, even before the Lord made known to him that his services were acceptable? But when this "*Father of the Faithful*" was commanded to immolate with his own hands his only son, his dear Isaac, on whose existence seemed to depend the fulfilment of all the promises which had been to him, then his God said to him: The trial I have made of your faith has proved you to be worthy of me; now I know that you love me.[4]

Indeed, to carry the cross with joy, to suffer tribulation and reproach with contentment, when labouring under the weight of this burthen not to sustain oneself by the hope of future blessings nor the unction of interior consolation but only by the strength of bare faith and the desire of becoming more

[1] Gal. iii, 1. [2] *Cf.* II Cor. v, 21. [3] John xi, 36.
[4] Gen. xxii, 12. Now I know that thou fearest God

like to Jesus Christ, here without doubt is the last effort and the most noble triumph of love over the heart of man; it is an incontestable proof of the interior working of God in the soul and the divine character of our religion.

Holy Spirit of God, you alone, by your interior lights, can reveal to us the attractions and the hidden beauty of the cross and of humiliations. You alone, by your grace, can give us a relish for food so repulsive to nature, you alone can destroy in us the inclinations of the old Adam, substituting for them a new heart and mind and by a happy regeneration change a carnal man into one wholly spiritual. This is unmistakably the work of the right hand of the most High; it is a miracle comparable to nothing else, perhaps even superior to that of creation. When God drew things out of nothing, he could meet with no possible resistance; but what opposition does he not encounter when he speaks to and commands hearts as corrupt as ours?

However, the Holy Spirit, says S Paul,[1] has created in Jesus Christ persons of all ages, of both sexes, of every condition, and there is no country in the universe in which he has not raised up to himself the most glorious trophies. The Apostles knew no other glory than to share the sufferings of Jesus Christ;[2] they went forth from the tribunals full of joy because they had been found worthy to suffer affronts for their Master's name. Nearly twenty million martyrs, urged on by an inward fire, wearied the fury of executioners and tyrants and hastened to their death more joyfully than to a delicious banquet. The deserts were peopled with solitaries; one generation succeeded another, and love incited these innocent victims to embrace lives of incredible hardship. What shall I say of the infinite number of the saints, both men and women? The subject is inexhaustible. S Ignatius cried out that Salamanca had not enough

[1] Eph. ii. [2] Acts v, 41.

prisons nor sufficient chains to satisfy his insatiable thirst for suffering. S Francis Xavier, foreseeing the hunger, thirst, persecutions, shipwreck, dangers and death to which his apostolate would expose him, cried out: Yet more, Lord, yet more. S Teresa could only satisfy the love which consumed her either by dying or suffering for God: *either to die or to suffer.* S Mary Magdalen de Pazzi preferred suffering to the enjoyment of God: *not to die, but to suffer.*

The Church has never lost this esteem and love of the cross: yes, even now the world possesses truly Christ-like souls who make poverty their riches, suffering their delight, and whose only complaint is that their crosses are not heavy enough. How ashamed we ought to be that such sentiments are not universal. We all profess to adore a poor, humbled and crucified God; faith in his word makes us believe that poverty, suffering, persecution are the true blessings of a Christian; that real and lasting glory is to be found in humiliations. Of what use to us will be our faith in Christ if we act like pagans? Shall we forever prefer our natural darkness to the light of the Gospel? Have we any real love for Jesus Christ, when we will not, for his sake, carry even a tiny splinter of the cross whose whole weight was borne by him for us?

Prayer.

Love divine, triumph over all those obstacles which have hitherto hindered your reign in my heart. You have triumphed over my God by fastening him to the cross: triumph over me by nailing me to the cross for him. My Jesus, by the help of your grace I am ready to suffer all for you, with you and like you, that I may resemble you in every possible way. Preserve and increase more and more these feelings with which you have inspired me, I beseech you, my God. Amen.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the glory concealed in the cross.

PRAYER.

Holy Spirit, impart to me a share in that vivid and abundant light with which thou hast enlightened thy saints. In thy light alone can I see what the obscurity of faith teaches me. *In thy light we shall see light.*[1] Give me to understand the maxims of the Gospel; then my soul shall live with the life of the saints, the life of Jesus Christ himself. May my mind perceive the honour, glory, even the Spirit of God concealed in insults and tribulations; may my heart desire and cherish them as its greatest and most solid glory.

I POINT.

To be like God is the highest state man can reach.

Jesus Christ is *light of light, God of God, true God of true God.* This is the basis and foundation of our holy religion.

1. By the light of this principle, reason feels and acknowledges that even to serve this sovereign Master, to obey his law, to be simply the minister of his orders, is for both angels and men a glory, and a great glory. How sublime and glorious then is the elevation of a man who has become like to Jesus Christ, and who is transformed into his image and likeness, as says S Paul?[2] Surely there is no glory on earth comparable to this.

2. What was the height to which the most unbounded and extravagant ambition of a created being ever aspired? *I will ascend above the height of the clouds*, said Lucifer, *I will be like the Most High.*[3] What was the temptation of Adam, that grand soul,

[1] Ps. xxxv, 10. [2] II Cor. iii, 18. [3] Isaias, xiv, 14.

noble and incapable of any base sentiment? Nothing less than the desire to become like to God.[1] But what was a crime in them is a virtue in us. Since in Jesus Christ God has made himself visible under the form of a slave,[2] not only is it permitted, it is even enjoined upon us to make ourselves the most perfect likeness we can of this divine model. The glory to which we are destined is therefore also the object of our most noble ambition.

3. In what consists that glory which, according to S Paul, God has reserved for us in his kingdom; that glory which eye has never seen nor ear heard of, and which far surpasses every idea and desire of men?[3] that glory purchased by the martyrs at the cost of so much suffering, and by all the saints by the practice of heroic virtue and renunciation? It consists in being like to Jesus Christ. I can and I ought to possess this glory even in this life; if it is not mine here below, it never will be in eternity. Thus the Christian soul modelled on Jesus Christ will pass, at the moment of his death, from glory to glory,[4] all worthy of the Spirit of God who is their author. Blind world, you do not know the splendour and magnificence of this glory. I am not surprised, for you do not know Jesus Christ.

4. When Assuerus clothed Mardochai in his own royal garments, placed his diadem on his head, and then caused him thus arrayed to be led through the city, could he procure him greater honour?[5] So when God wishes specially to honour any of his faithful servants, he puts on them the garments of his Son, in their hands he places the sceptre and on their heads the crown of this same Son; then all the angels cry out: See how *those are treated whom the King* of heaven *desires to honour.*[6] This distinction is truly worthy of God, and is the more glorious because each of these special favourites bears the likeness of God

[1] Gen. iii, 5. [2] Phil. ii, 7 [3] I Cor. ii, 9. [4] II Cor. iii, 18.
[5] Esther vi, 8. [6] Esther vi, 9.

less exteriorly and in their body than interiorly and in heart.

Children of men, how low and crawling are your ambitions, worthy of the mud from which you were made. Puffed up with pride for insignificant and paltry advantages, you do not know how to value true and solid glory. But to become one spirit with God, by conformity of thought and ideal, to be in a manner changed and transformed into God, this is a glory which raises man to a state only inferior to God himself. He who does not believe this is an atheist; he who believes it and remains unmoved, is an idiot. The true Christian well understands this glory, he knows its value; being raised on the wings of faith and love to God himself, he has no other ambition than to be like Jesus Christ, both here and hereafter.

II Point.

By humiliations and sufferings we become like to the Man-God.

We glory, says S Paul, *in the hope of the glory of the sons of God, and not only so, but we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.*[1] Yes, both are equally the object of our glory, because both have the same power of making us like to Jesus Christ.

Such language frightens and disgusts our corrupt nature. Reason itself, misled by passion, so deceives our heart that it cannot conceive that the glory of a Christian can consist in humiliations.

If an earthly king, engaged in besieging an enemy's fortress, condescends to take his share in the labours of his soldiers, the work is thereby ennobled; everyone wants to do his share, hastening to the work, and considering it an honour to dig trenches in company with the king. Does not then the king

[1] Rom. v, 2, 3.

of kings, the Man-God, ennoble, by his choice and example, tribulation and humiliation? Does he not imprint upon them a character of greatness and glory? Where is our faith?

In Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ, all that he has made his own has changed its nature. Nothing is so vile as our clay, yet it has become divine in Jesus Christ. Nothing is so infamous as the gibbet; yet that on which Jesus Christ accomplished the work of our redemption has become the object of our adoration. We honour with religious worship the nails which fastened him to it, the lance which pierced his sacred side, the thorns which composed his crown. Yet, my Jesus, you have united to your divinity your poverty, sufferings and humiliations far more closely than the instruments of your passion. Since you are a God-Man, you are a God who is poor, suffering and humiliated. Otherwise, humiliations would appear contemptible and hateful; but by espousing them you have made them noble, glorious; you have even made them in some sort divine. I ought to regard them as a drop of your chalice, a tiny share in your sufferings: I ought to accept them with the same gratitude with which I should receive a splinter of the true cross, I ought to honour them as glorious relics. If I do not feel thus, I have not yet risen above flesh and blood.

These feelings are the more reasonable in that poverty, the cross and humiliation are evidently so many points of resemblance with the adorable Person of Jesus Christ. The more God heaps crosses on anyone, the more does he perfect in him the likeness of his Son; the copy is not exactly like the original until the cross is felt to be heavy, bitter, without sweetness and consolations. Yes, when God sees a man to be crowned with humiliations, clothed with poverty, and bearing the cross; *Behold*, he says, *the tunic*, behold the diadem and sceptre *of my Son*.[1]

[1] Gen. xxxvii.

The very angels, deceived, so to speak, by the resemblance, say to one another: Either the eternal Word converses again among men, or else this is a second Jesus Christ, for this is the state in which we saw him on earth, poor, suffering and humiliated. Could any man be raised to a glory more sublime and excellent? Could he receive from God a more sure token of his love and tenderness? After sharing the lot of Jesus Christ in time, can he doubt that he will do so in eternity?

If anyone among us is rich, says S James, respected and loved by everyone, and the troubles of this life seem to pass him by, let him be humiliated and confounded.[1] His happiness and glory before men are in reality a state of humiliation and abjection, for he is in a state of opposition to Jesus Christ. But let him among us who, on the contrary, is poor, suffering and despised, rejoice and be glad. His elevation is very real and very solid, for he is like to the Man-God. Thus have the apostles and all the saints thought and spoken.

Prayer.

Adorable heart of Jesus, inexhaustible source of lights and graces, make my mind, and still more my heart, realize intensely that there is no other glory in the whole world than to be like you; stifle in me every other ambition and desire. If I do not esteem and love poverty, suffering and humiliation, the three companions which you chose for yourself, it is not possible that I love and adore you sincerely as my God. Let me rather cease to live than cease to adore and love you. Amen.

[1] *Cf.* S James i, 10

TENTH DAY.

First Meditation.

On the desire of loving Jesus Christ.

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

Searcher of hearts, you know that I love you, and that I desire to love you still more. Satisfy, in your mercy, my desires to their full extent; from this plenitude will be born a new hunger, a new and yet more insatiable thirst for your love. If my love shall thus increase through the strength of my desires, and my desires in turn be increased by love, my whole being will be consumed by the flames of charity. Amen.

I Point.

This desire ought to be ardent and continual.

Looked at in the state of glory, God is great and infinitely worthy of our praise. God in a manger and on a cross is humiliated for me, and in this humiliation he is infinitely worthy of my love. *The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; the Lord is little, and greatly to be loved*, says S Bernard. If it were possible, I ought to praise, bless and adore God in a manner proportionate to the degree of his elevation above me. *Praise ye the Lord according to the multitude of his greatness.*[1] If it were possible, I ought to love God humiliated with a love proportionate to the degrees by which he has stooped down to me. But since our heart is not capable of infinite love, at least let our desires of loving Jesus be boundless and continual.

Thus the true lovers of Jesus Christ will desire to have a thousand minds and a thousand lives, or

[1] Ps. cl, 2.

rather to have the minds and hearts of all men, to adore him in all minds and love him in all hearts; they long to unite in themselves all the homage, all the adoration, all the love of the seraphim and the saints. Still more; because they know that the love of angels and men is not, strictly speaking, worthy of Jesus Christ, they envy, with a holy jealousy, the Queen of angels and men, who alone has loved her Son more than all other creatures put together, and they desire to burn with the same holy flames of love which burned in the heart of this holy Mother of God. Lastly, in imitation of that prophet who, after having invited all creatures to praise and bless the Lord, offered him the honour and glory due to him for his divine perfections and his infinite mercies, the saints, not knowing how else to satisfy their burning desires, offer to Jesus Christ the necessary and infinite love with which he is loved by his Father and the Holy Ghost.

How great is the difference between the saints and ourselves! Have we any adequate idea of Jesus Christ and of what he deserves from us, we whose aspirations are so languid, lukewarm and selfish? However much Jesus Christ did and suffered for us, he yet desired to do and suffer far more, thus giving us the model of a heart really wounded by love. It is from you then, my Jesus, that I ought and I desire to learn how to love you.[1]

This longing to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus ought continually to occupy and stimulate our heart. Jesus is always infinitely lovable; I ought therefore to love him continually. Never can I love him as he deserves; never therefore will I cease to invite heaven and earth to love him for me, and I will seek everywhere for means to supply for my indigence and incapacity. This life is a journey; Jesus, infinitely lovable, is the goal: I must never slacken my pace, but hurry on. If I were ever to

[1] S Bernard.

stop, it would be an insult to this God of love. By my indifference I should seem to say to him that my love, still so imperfect, was enough for him; and thus to pause would do me incalculable harm. My sighs are not unknown to this infinitely wise Judge: he listens to my desires and to the preparation of my heart,[1] he will repay me in time and in eternity. In time by opening to me ever more widely his Heart, the source of all lights and graces; in eternity, by uniting himself to me and me to himself with a most tender and perfect love. What riches, what treasures shall I not lose if for one moment I interrupt my desire of loving my God!

But whose desires, Lord, do you hear? Only the desires of those who, unable to love you as much as they would, yet love you as much as they can; those who refuse you none of the sacrifices you require of them, and who, docile to the inspirations of your holy Spirit, allow themselves to be turned in any direction by the wind of your divine grace. On the other hand, you despise and hate those sterile desires, hypocritical and lying, of hearts which seem to desire your love, and then, when occasion arises, refuse to give you any proofs of it. Unless I wilfully blind myself, unless I feed upon my own delusions, how can I believe that I sincerely desire to grow in your love while I deliberately turn away from every occasion of proving it, while I do not practice patience in adversities, while I stoop to low and earthly motives and take no care to mortify my natural inclinations.

God of mercy, have I not lived hitherto in the illusion which now I am condemning? How often have I said with my lips: *God of my heart, I love you: but how little I love; make me to love you more.* Yet how often do I resist your inspirations; how often does my self-love hinder the fulfilment of your loving designs! I will never cease, my Jesus,

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 10.

to desire your love more and more; but I will cease to be unfaithful, at least as far as is possible in this place of exile.

II Point.

This desire ought to be insatiable.

Love never says: It is enough: and the most insatiable of all loves is that of Jesus, whether we consider it with regard to its object or with reference to the principle from which it originates.

We are always prone to love creatures more than we ought: never do we love Jesus as he deserves.

Jesus is infinitely lovable; being God, he is infinitely beautiful, infinitely good, infinitely perfect.

Jesus is infinitely lovable as our benefactor; the blessings he gives us and the evils from which he delivers us are as infinite as God himself.

Jesus is infinitely lovable as our friend; his adorable heart loves each one of us with a love greater than that love which all the angels and saints have for God; and if his omnipotence had not sustained and supported him during his mortal life the intensity of his love would at every moment have caused his death.

When a heart is touched at the sight of this infinite lovableness it humiliates itself, it is ashamed that it loves so imperfectly; when it compares its debt to Jesus with what it actually gives it feels that it has not begun to love. Nothing can lessen this confusion or relieve its sorrow except the desire of a more intense love, a love more worthy of Jesus, who is, by so many titles, infinitely worthy of love. When this desire is sincere it is always granted and its plenitude shews how great is the need of the human heart.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life, he is the source from which spring the waters of salvation; the more one eats of this bread and drinks this water the more does one hunger and thirst. Each new degree

of love brings the soul deeper into this divine sanctuary, and shews more clearly the treasure it contains. In proportion as the mind becomes more perfect in this eminent science and knowledge, the heart in its turn becomes more inflamed; the love which it conceives is the measure of the torment caused by the hunger and thirst of being ever more closely united to Jesus Christ by the bonds of an ever new love.

2. The Holy Spirit, Father of lights and author of the charity which he pours out in our hearts, will not permit that a soul docile to his inspirations should content itself with earthly happiness; he urges it on to aspire after the possession of a greater good, a more perfect love of Jesus Christ. This is one of the principal aims of his mission; he came down upon earth, he continually pours out his gifts in order to bear witness to the Word Incarnate by making him universally known and loved. With what ardour does he enkindle everywhere this heavenly and divine fire, how great is the heat with which it burns! His activities are infinite; they are only limited by the weakness of the creatures who are the subjects of his operations.

As soon as he has fulfilled the first desires which he has himself excited, he inspires us to ask still more. Incessantly does he solicit, urge, drive on the heart in which he dwells. He dilates and expands its natural capacity; he gives to its activities a new force and a vigour which neither nature nor passion could ever communicate. In short, as he enkindles desires and longings utterly unintelligible to carnal minds, so also does he elicit unspeakable yearnings and prayers.

What joy I find, my Jesus, in the thought that your saints were devoured and consumed by the fire of your love, and by the desire of loving you ever more and more. What a consolation it is to see that the most violent passions have never produced in the

lovers of this world transports comparable to those experienced by your true lovers.

Holy Virgin, it was not so much death which ended your blessed life as your vehement desire of giving back to your Son as great a love as he had for you. It does not astonish me that you should die of love; rather am I astonished that you were able to live with so great fire burning in your heart; both your life and your death were truly worthy of the Mother of God.

Prayer to all the Saints.

Heaven, in which you dwell, is the home of love; the earth, where I am exiled, is the place of desires. When shall I go to join your happy company, to see clearly, to love perfectly, to possess fully my God and my all? Until this happy moment arrives, obtain for me by your united prayers a continual, ardent and insatiable love: that alone can console me in my exile. And since there are not limits to love, why should there be any to my gratitude?

Second Meditation.

Jesus Christ is the rightful object of my love.

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

You never weary of seeing me at your feet, nor of listening to my petitions: neither will I ever grow weary of uttering them. I have yet another grace to implore. Penetrate my mind with this important truth: *Jesus Christ is the rightful object of my love;* let it be so deeply engraved on my heart that at every moment it will be present to my memory, so that henceforth the whole trend of my life may rise from love, find in love its goal, and be animated by nothing else but love.

I Point.

Motives for loving Jesus Christ.

I began my retreat with you, I will finish it with you, my Jesus, and I will recall to mind those beautiful motives which have made such a deep impression on my heart, which made me determine to love you.

You are infinitely good and infinitely to be loved. From all eternity you have loved me and you love me still with an infinite love. A heart capable of loving; this heart loved with an eternal and infinite love by its sovereign Lord: what ought it not to do for him, how greatly ought it to love him?

Why did you draw me out of the void in which I might have remained for ever hidden, without your creative word? What was your plan in giving and preserving my life in preference to so many other creatures? Only in order that I might love you. I was created by love; love alone determined you to think of me while I was yet nothing. I was created for love; for the end of your law is charity, and you require nothing from me except to lead me to love. How glorious is my destiny; God has no other occupation but to love himself, and if I conform to his designs for me, I have no other occupation than to love him. How happy is my lot; I belong to God; God belongs to me, and a mutual and eternal love ought to unite us.

What do creatures say to me? Everything in this vast universe speaks to me of your love, everything invites me to love you; even those creatures without reason charge me with the duty of paying you the tribute of love they owe and which they can only pay by my means. My God, your love encircles me on every side, continually I enjoy the profusion and generosity of your love; unceasingly you serve me by means of an infinity of creatures; it is impossible

that I should not love you. Would not heaven and earth rise up against me, would they not reproach me for my blindness, my ingratitude and my invincible obduracy? It is not only by the voice of creatures that God asks for my heart; he makes his own heard, he speaks as a Master, he commands; but what? the love that is his due. He has made it the first and great commandment of his law. He threatens me with eternal punishment if I do not love him: if I do love him he promises me as reward the enjoyment of himself for ever and ever. Yes, Lord, this commandment, these threats, these promises lay bare your heart, they shew me the immense desire you have of my heart. If you had wished to repel me you would have forbidden me to love you, for this is the greatest and most intolerable of miseries not to love you.

Instead, what do I see? My God descends from the throne of his glory into the womb of a Virgin, he is made flesh, he is born in poverty; he is set at nought, struck, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross; lastly he dies a most cruel and shameful death. What is the meaning of these strange and inconceivable mysteries? They are only to manifest the excess of his love and to make us love him. My Jesus, who would not love you?

To make himself more and more sole Master of my heart, this same Jesus made himself, and has remained for nineteen centuries, a prisoner under the forms of bread and wine. In this Sacrament he lives amongst us, he lives for us, he becomes in some sort incarnate in each one of us; all this is to enable us to feel certain of the help of his grace and his special protection, to increase our love by the intensity of his own, to communicate to us all his treasures, in short, to transform us into himself. Adorable mystery, which contains and surpasses all the other wonders of his love.

Such are the chief motives which ought to induce

us to the love of Jesus Christ; how imperious they are! In truth, is it the lives of the saints or our own that ought to astonish us most? What in them ought to appear incredible? Not the intense love of so many souls for Jesus Christ, but rather our indifference towards him.

II Point.

Motives for loving Jesus Christ alone.

1. While God grants me the time, the light and the grace, I desire to consider seriously with myself, to reason, to weigh, to take up a definite standpoint from which I will never again swerve.

The first thought which presents itself is the all-important affair of my salvation. How do I feel about it? It is a question of choosing between God and creatures, time and eternity, paradise and hell, innocence and sin. The choice presents no difficulty; the disproportion of the objects is so evident that only a fool or an atheist could hesitate for a moment. I will, therefore, do everything and sacrifice everything for my salvation.

2. Shall the maxims of Jesus Christ or those of the world regulate my plan of conduct? Whom shall I accuse of folly, Jesus Christ or the world? The divinity of Jesus decides this question. There are men wicked enough to refuse to believe in him; there cannot be anyone so senseless as to doubt that words which proceed from the mouth of One whom he believes to be God are spirit, life and truth. Jesus, you are my Lord and my God: I will cling to you, I will renounce the world; your wisdom has convicted it of folly. Besides, these maxims, which all tend to attach my heart to this perishable world, are contradicted and disproved by my reason which teaches me that I am greater than the world, I am made only for God.

3. I renounce the world and I cling to Jesus Christ. But do I mean to give him all without reserve, to close my heart to every other love? Let the world itself decide, let it promulgate the law which I am to follow. What do the perfections of Jesus Christ require from me, his love, his sufferings, his benefits, his rewards, his ardent desire for my love? Such love is infinite and requires, were it possible, an infinite return; even the world must acknowledge this. Yes, Lord, unable to love you as much as I ought, I desire to love you as much as I can, with all my mind, with all my heart, with all my powers. Henceforth I will love nothing except in you or for you. My love shall be yours whole and undivided. Deign to receive the sacrifice I offer; it is infinitely less than you deserve, but what more can you ask of one who has given you all?

4. I am not my own, I belong to Jesus Christ. Why? Because he has bought me; I am his thing, his possession, his purchase. Has he bought only part of me? No; he has acquired entire possession. He has bought my mind with all its thoughts, my heart with all its affections, my soul with all its faculties, my life with its every moment. For what purpose has he bought me? That I may no longer live for myself but only for him; he will consent to no division, he will be the sole possessor of what he has bought. Lastly, what price has he paid for me? Gold or silver? The wealth of the whole world? No, no. If that were so, I should belong to Jesus Christ only by a title of justice, as a field, an investment or a slave belongs to the master who has bought him. It is at the price of his blood, of all his blood that he has bought me: his whole self was the price he paid to possess me entirely, says S Bernard. Happy those who understand this admirable and touching theology; more happy still those who take it for their rule of conduct, and who, in life and death, seek nothing but Jesus Christ!

I have then the right to love Jesus Christ. May he grant me in his mercy to pass all my days in his love, to love him and him alone; so shall my death also be a death of love.

III Point.

Reflection on the two preceding points.

I ought to love Jesus, who is so worthy of my love; I ought to love nothing but him, or at least nothing except for him. I have been taught motives, urgent motives which ought to determine me to this; I know that my happiness in time and in eternity depends upon my love for Jesus.

But have I loved him truly in the past? If I have not chosen rightly, how great has been my folly; how insolently have I rebelled against the best of masters and the most tender of friends; how ungrateful towards my Creator, my Benefactor, my Preserver, my Saviour, my All? Is it possible that I have been able to live without loving Jesus, or with a tepid and half-hearted love?

My Jesus, rather would I have lost my life than my innocence. Should not my tears be my food day and night, till I obtain thy mercy? I know you will hear me; say to my soul those same loving words which Magdalen heard: Much is forgiven thee, because thou hast loved much.[1]

If, in punishment for my many infidelities, Jesus had forbidden me to love him, if he had refused me his grace, it would have been no more than I deserved. But if, treating me with less severity, he had left me with a hope of obtaining his love at the end of my earthly course, and that on condition that during the whole rest of my life I should share with him in his suffering, poverty, outrages, scourging, his crown of thorns, his death upon the cross, could I have complained of this? He is innocent, I am guilty;

[1] Lk. vii, 49.

he is offended, I am the offender. I accept these penalties with a good will; only hasten the moment when I shall love you, and love nothing but you.

But Jesus acts as a Father, as a tender and compassionate Lover, with this soul which has been so unfaithful to him. He allows me to love him now, at once. All that he requires of me is that I love him, and that I fulfil all the duties of my state, and that I receive with submission from his hand the little crosses he thinks fit to lay upon me. On this condition he pardons all my sins, he receives me into his friendship, he blots out my sentence of condemnation, he opens heaven to me. Lord Jesus, see here my heart; it is more yours than mine; enkindle in it all the love with which you desire that I should love you; would that it could equal your love and bounty towards me!

Prayer to Jesus Christ.

For the last time in this retreat I speak to you, my Jesus. I offer you your own boundless mercy to thank you for all the lights you have communicated to me, for all the holy desires you have quickened in me. I am ready to ratify and to seal with my blood the promise I have so often reiterated of loving you and you alone. Grant me the grace to keep this resolution faithfully at all times. Incessantly will I repeat to myself: *I have a God, I have a Jesus Christ to love, I will love him only, I will love him without measure.* My God, my Jesus, this is all my wisdom, all my knowledge, all my glory. Amen.

A DEVOUT EXERCISE ON THE CRUCIFIX

I

For a soul who contemplates it with the eyes of faith, a crucifix is the greatest, the most beautiful, the most instructive of spectacles. From it alone can we learn a thorough knowledge of God, his greatness, his mercy, his infinite justice; from it also do we gain a true knowledge of ourselves and of sin. He who has studied his crucifix well has learnt much. *I judged myself not to know anything among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.*[1] S Francis of Assisi tells us that eternity will not suffice the mind and heart of man to draw out of the crucifix all the treasures of knowledge and love concealed, so to speak, in it; if anyone desires to attain true wisdom the crucifix is the book he should study day and night without ever growing weary.

II

Would you learn the infinite greatness and majesty of God? Study your crucifix. The Man-God whom you see nailed to the cross is the only true adorer of God. The Angels, Dominations and Powers, realizing the infinite disproportion between what is owing to God and what they are able to offer him, unite their praises, their adorations, their reverence and their trembling to that homage which the Word incarnate and dying on a cross, renders to God. The only Victim worthy of God is a Man-God; the only worship which adequately honours the majesty of God is the truly infinite worship paid by a God-Man; it is only by his love and by his adorable heart that the infinite goodness and beauty of God can be

[1] I Cor. ii, 2.

worthily loved. In short, God, knowing and loving himself, procures for himself an intrinsic glory which is in truth infinite; in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ he receives an extrinsic glory equally infinite. In order to perpetuate on earth this worship, homage and honour alone worthy of God, Jesus Christ has willed to perpetuate on our altars the sacrifice of the cross; and because Jesus Christ shall live for ever, God will for ever be honoured and loved by God. But we wretched creatures, when we have done and suffered all we can for God, must still be ashamed and humiliated, and regard ourselves as useless servants, astonished that God deigns so much as to look at our poor service and our sacrifices. *When you shall have done all these things say: We are unprofitable servants.* (Lk. xvii, 10.)

III

Before you turn your eyes away from the crucifix, consider attentively and in detail the "Man of Sorrows," his head crowned with thorns, his face covered with bruises, his mouth parched by the vinegar and gall, his ears deafened by murderous shouts, his eyes saddened by the spectacle of the rage and fury of his enemies, his body one universal wound, his hands and feet pierced with nails. Enter into his soul and measure, if you can, the sea of sorrow which fills his heart and inundates his soul. Was there ever a holocaust more universal, more entire, more perfect? By this example the Man-God teaches us how God ought to be served, he teaches us to take for our motto: Never enough for God. Never enough respect for a God of infinite majesty; never enough fidelity and submission to the will of a God who has the right of infinite domination over us; never enough gratitude for a God whose liberality is infinite; never enough love for a God infinitely loving and infinitely worthy of love. Our reverence, our service, our sacrifices are already

infinitely limited by the nothingness of our being; shall we limit them still further by our cowardice? May the grace of God preserve us from this.

IV

Do you desire to know somewhat of the terrible justice of God? No need to go to the brink of hell; remain at the foot of your crucifix. Who are those who suffer in that place of torment? Those wretched and ungrateful sinners who have over and over again resisted the tender entreaties of their God, who have remained rebellious till the hour of death. After this, the justice of God has nothing which can astonish me. But he who suffers on the cross is the just One, the supremely holy One; he is the only Son of God the Father, necessarily the object of his complacence and love. Yet, because he has taken upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, because he is laden with our iniquities, his Father is changed in his regard into a pitiless judge, according to the expression of the prophet; he has struck him without pity or compassion; in the counsels of his justice he has decreed every circumstance of his ignominious passion; in a word, he has treated him as sin itself, as sin personified. O terrible sanctity of God, inconceivable prodigy of formidable justice! If the green wood is treated with such severity, shall the dry wood be spared? If the innocent One, if the Man-God finds no indulgence at the hands of a Father who loves him with an infinite love, how should we tremble who have so much to answer for?

V

Perhaps you find it difficult to understand how the justice of God can punish the sin of a moment with an eternity of suffering? Believe firmly that he whom you see fastened to a cross is true God, and then meditate on these three truths: The sin of a moment, if it be mortal, has caused the passion and

death of God; this sin renews the humiliations and death of God; this sin renders useless the cross and death of God. Then you will understand the relative proportion between sin, the passion of God, and hell. The passion is the reparation for sin, hell is its punishment. Then you will realize that these three things, each in its own degree, are alike equally inconceivable and incomprehensible, and that a sin which could only be atoned for by the sufferings of God, that is, by an oblation of infinite worth, could only be adequately punished by a penalty infinite in its duration, that is, eternal. Lastly, you will realize what is too little understood, the malice of venial sin. For if, to satisfy the divine justice and repair the injury done to God by mortal sin, it was necessary that Christ should suffer and pour out his blood upon the cross, it was necessary in the same sense that he should be humiliated and set at nought to efface adequately, and by a satisfaction proportionate, venial sin. Happy those who understand these truths, who fear the only thing which ought to be feared, and prefer death itself to committing the smallest sin with any deliberation.

VI

Philosophers have laboured at giving man a knowledge of himself. Some, who seem chiefly struck by the traces of nobility which still remain to him in his degradation, have drawn of him a beautiful and magnificent portrait, adorned with the most pleasing colours. Others, on the contrary, have made a hideous picture of man, perhaps more like him than the other, and have depicted his miseries in the darkest and most sombre colours. But neither class have a true appreciation of either the nobility or the misery of man; this knowledge can only be gained in the school of the cross. There we learn that man was conceived on Calvary, and born from the precious blood of Jesus Christ; that in

consequence of this glorious and happy regeneration he has been, so to speak, adopted into the family of the Blessed Trinity; that he has become the son of God the Father, the brother of God the Son, the living and animated temple of God the Holy Spirit; that he is a blood-relation of God and participates in his nature. Only the infinite power and mercy of God, says S Paul, could thus raise the dust and clay of our nature to a glory as solid as it is divine.

In this same school of the cross we learn that man, cast down by sin from his high dignity, exiled from his true country, separated from God who is his only real happiness, has no resources in himself nor can find any in angels or men, or any pure creature; that only the hand of God can heal the terrible wounds caused by his fall; lastly, that by the decrees of eternal Wisdom there remains no other remedy for the woes of this miserable being except the blood of a God-Man. *Without shedding of blood, there is no remission.*[1]

Christian piety consists in great part in a true knowledge of the misery and the greatness of man: his misery, that he may despise himself with true and deep humility; his greatness and nobility, that all his thoughts, desires and conduct may be worthy of so sublime a dignity.

VII

If I were obliged to live in complete solitude, I need not in the least regret the most eloquent and learned preachers, provided that I knew how to listen to my crucifix. What preacher could instil into my soul so intimate a knowledge, so deep an understanding, so sincere a love for these beatitudes of the Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed those who find no consolation on earth; blessed those who suffer*, etc.? What preacher could utter in such soul-stirring tones words like these: *Woe to you, rich; woe to*

[1] Heb. ix, 22.

you who are esteemed and respected; woe to you who enjoy the pleasures of this world, who seem to succeed in everything? The silence of Jesus Christ, poor, humiliated and suffering upon the cross, is far more eloquent in persuading us of these great truths than all the skill of the most famous orators. Furthermore, Jesus Christ gives us a heavenly light to understand these hidden truths as well as the grace to put them in practice. Let all teachers be silent then, all creatures hold their peace; let Jesus Christ alone speak to my mind and heart.

VIII

If I am in search of a master who can teach me all virtues, even the most sublime, I can find one in the crucifix. The cross, says S Augustine, is the pulpit from which Jesus teaches the world. He only speaks, instructs, gives lessons in sublime virtue by the language of his actions, more persuasive by far than words. *Doctrinam suam patibulo roboravit.* (S Jerome.) To confound the pride of the world and persuade it of the beauty of humility of mind and heart, the God of all majesty manifests himself covered with shame and ignominy. To persuade it of the necessity of obedience, and of the destruction of self-will, he who has not and never could have any master shews himself submissive and obedient. But to whom? To his executioners. To what extent? Unto death, even the death of the cross. To persuade it to practise mortification of the flesh, the impassible God, become the Man of Sorrows, presents to it his body torn with whips and covered with wounds from head to foot. Surely, if the world would only recognize the Lord of glory, if with a living faith it would adore him under the veil of our flesh, then, enlightened and undeceived, it would abjure its errors: it would renounce its false maxims and change its conduct; touched and softened in the deepest recesses of the heart, it would have no

other ambition than to be treated like Jesus Christ, and would say with the apostle: I make it my glory, my happiness and my treasure to share with Jesus Christ in his humiliations, his sufferings and his poverty.

Why is the world so deluged with horrible evils? Simply because we do not meditate, we do not seriously study Jesus Christ, or if we do, it is only with a weak and languishing faith. *Omnia possibilia sunt credenti.*

IX

If I seek a director who will give me advice suitable to the interior disposition of my soul, I can find one in my crucifix. Jesus Christ is a Manna, hidden indeed and almost unknown to many people, but which takes all sorts of tastes in the mouth of a spiritual man. He is a new propitiatory which ever gives replies in accordance with the needs of those who interrogate it.

Does the memory of my sins overwhelm me with immoderate fear? A secret voice whispers to my ear: *Take courage; cast your sins into my blood and I will blot them out.* Am I, on the contrary, unmoved at the sight of my faults? I hear interiorly this reproach, which touches and humiliates me: *Thy sins have cost the shedding of all my blood; yet they have not cost thee one tear; my blood has broken down the gates of hell, but it has not yet been able to break down the obduracy of your heart.* In seasons of temptation my crucifix cries out to me: *Enter through the wound of my heart and hide yourself in it, there you will be secure.* In times of persecution my heart trembles, but this short word of Jesus Christ will reanimate and sustain it: *See how I was treated; is the disciple above his Master?* In all the repugnances which the flesh excites against the spirit, the mere sight of the crucifix recalls to my mind how Jesus Christ fought against himself: it heartens me to resist even to blood and to say

generously: *I will follow you, Lord: your will be done, not mine.* In desolation and interior abandonment when my soul, without sweetness or devotion, asks itself: *Where is thy God?* Jesus Christ shews himself to me on the cross, abandoned by his Father. My present likeness to this greatest of all the predestinate sustains me and encourages me to bear the trial which God sends me; it shall be my consolation to be without consolation on earth. How fortunate is that soul who knows how to have recourse on all occasions to its crucifix, to listen, and to learn its lessons.

X

If I seek a casuist who can resolve the problems of my conscience, I find him in my crucifix. Certainly, its teaching is severe, its decisions austere; that is why we prefer to take for our casuist our own self-love and egoism. But let religious persons rather consult their crucifix in good faith concerning questions of poverty, obedience, the observance of their rules; let ecclesiastics consult it, with the same dispositions, to know how they may best edify the faithful, concerning zeal for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls; what a reform, what sanctity we should see in these persons! However it may be, the crucifix publishes openly and without concealment that all that is not God is but nothing, and ought to be despised as nothing; that a divided heart cannot please God and that he desires to possess our whole being, since it belongs entirely to him by right; that the barren tree should be rooted up and the useless servant cast into outer darkness; that it is shameful in the member of a body whose Head was crowned with thorns to be delicate and to seek ease and pleasure; that we shall only receive the hundredfold on earth and taste the joys of heaven in proportion as we have denied ourselves earthly satisfactions; that we can only possess all by losing all; that in the army of Jesus Christ we only

attain to peace through war, to happiness through suffering, and to life through death; that, finally, he alone is the truth to which we must listen, the way in which we must walk and the life by which we must live.

XI

What would it profit us to find all this in Jesus Christ crucified if this great and instructive spectacle had no life in it and no influence over our minds and hearts? But it is the most persuasive and touching of sights. It is certain, and it is S Paul himself who assures us of it, that for all those who have true faith Jesus crucified is *the wisdom and the strength of God*. As the *wisdom of God*, he disabuses our minds of prejudices and errors; as the *strength of God* he roots out of our hearts the evil weeds of passion, he plants and brings to perfection the flowers of all virtues.

Yes, Jesus Christ crucified is for the human mind the solution of all possible difficulties, for indeed, says S Bernard, either Jesus is deceived or the world is in error, since they pronounce directly opposite judgements on such subjects as poverty, humiliation, suffering and so forth. But it is impossible that Jesus Christ should be deceived: he is the wisdom of God, the brightness of eternal and uncreated light, which cannot be obscured by the slightest cloud. It is the world then that is in error; its wisdom is folly condemned by God; and we, if we firmly believe in the divinity and therefore also the infallibility of Jesus Christ, we are the children of light and we see things as God himself sees them.

In the same degree, Jesus crucified, as the *strength* of God is the solution of all the difficulties which can trouble the heart. What means has grace employed to form for God a company of saints, to root out of their hearts the smallest fibres of all the passions, and to produce in these purified hearts every virtue, even the most heroic? Incontestably, it was nothing

else than the example of Jesus crucified. Indeed, nothing is so persuasive as example, and there has never been any example as imperious as that of the Man-God. What man could possibly resist it, if he were convinced and persuaded of the divinity of Jesus Christ?

Moses in the desert had no other sign of salvation to oppose to the ills and miseries of the Israelites than a serpent of brass lifted up on high. To-day the symbol has been superseded by the reality, and the only sign of salvation for Christians is that of Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross. Whoever gazes on it and contemplates it attentively with the eyes of faith shall live. He shall live with the life of the spirit, because he will know the greatness, the majesty, the mercy and the infinite justice of God; because he will listen to a preacher, a director, a casuist who will guide him infallibly in the ways of the Lord: he will live the life of the heart, because he will hate sin as the greatest of abominations; because he will love those virtues which he will see divinised, so to speak, in Jesus Christ; because, finally, Jesus Christ is the *strength of God*, and ought to imprint on souls the deepest of impressions.

Let us hasten then, and let us constantly dwell at the feet of the Man-God nailed to the cross by love: let us quicken our steps to appear before him: let us celebrate his glory, let us sing his praises; prostrate in his presence let us adore him with a lively faith. We are his people, his flock, his lambs; he is our Master, our God and our Saviour. Let us humbly confess our sins and miseries; let us unceasingly study and contemplate this divine model, let us listen to his voice; we shall find in him the source of every blessing. God, who sincerely desires to save us, will refuse to no one, but rather offers abundantly, the light to know his grace, to understand Jesus crucified. To know God and Jesus Christ his Son, whom he has sent on the earth for the salvation of the world, in this consists life eternal.

RULE OF LIFE

Father Huby was one of those good and faithful servants who are eager and attentive to make the most of the talents entrusted to them. With this in view, it was his custom to write down exactly all the practical lights he received from God in prayer: but convinced that Christian justice does not consist in knowing the will of God, he made this adorable will the constant and invariable rule of his conduct. His biographer has taken pains to prove this by the recital of many facts of which he was an eye-witness; he has abundantly proved that the rule of life drawn up by him was admirably observed by the holy man. Therefore, to understand the meaning, the extent and the principles which we are about to set down, is to know Père Huby interiorly as well as exteriorly.

The most important point in the spiritual life is to will to belong wholly and sovereignly to God alone, to will only that, but to will it with all our power and to make open profession of it. With this entire and full determination, we emerge from the bondage of all our meannesses and littlenesses; we practise virtue easily and on every occasion; we enjoy the liberty of the children of God; we taste an interior peace whose sweetness is not mingled with the bitterness of a reproachful conscience. You ask me, my God, for my whole heart: I give it up to your love, I devote it entirely to your designs, and I abandon it without reserve to the leading of your grace.

To fly from evil and do good, these are the two parts and, as it were, the two branches of piety and of all morality. I will avoid the shadow and even the appearance of evil, I will embrace every occasion of

doing good. I will do both with the utmost possible perfection, promptly and without delay; fully, with a will in which there shall be no division or hesitation; purely, without any human consideration, but in order that God alone may reign in me; constantly, without repugnance, weariness or faltering.

God knows how to turn evil to his glory and to draw from it the good of his elect; following his example, I will draw good and profit even from my sins. They shall humiliate me and cover me with a salutary confusion; they shall re-animate my vigilance and my watchfulness over the movements of my heart; by means of the lively contrition I will feel for them, they shall inspire me with a greater fear of falling into the same sins and with a greater zeal for practising the contrary virtues.

Why should I attach myself during life to what death will snatch from me? Why should I love in time what I cannot possess for eternity? With the help of grace, as far as is possible, I must keep my heart and mind as much disengaged from the affairs of earth as if I were in heaven. This is what is meant, to this I am invited by those words of the Lord's Prayer: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

God asks of me that at every moment I should live with the same detachment from creatures, the same purity of intention, the same sentiments that I should wish to have at the last moment of my life; that I should judge of all things as I should then judge; that I should watch over myself with as much care, that I should combat my enemies with as much energy as if each moment were to be my last, and my eternity were about to begin. You will it, my God, and by your mercy I will it also, with all my heart.

Up to the present, I have struggled against myself, and my occupation has been to tear out and uproot, to prepare for the God of all purity a dwelling which

shall be worthy of him. Henceforth my employment shall be in no way to hinder or trouble the work of God in my soul, in no way to weaken or interrupt it. By an interior submission, constant and peaceful, I will leave God to work, destroy, purify, build, fortify and animate as he shall please. How useful is this employment, how noble, how excellent! It is what makes saints.

It is not the persons with whom I live, nor exterior employments, nor intellectual advantages, nor talents and successes that can give me sanctity. God in my heart, and my heart in God, that is the basis, that is the foundation of sanctity. Despising then all the rest, I will retire, I will shut myself up in my own heart. God shall be master there; He shall do there whatever he pleases without any resistance on my part.

The idea of sanctity with which God has inspired me and my happiness on this earth consist in unity, that is, in giving my whole attention to what God wants of me at the actual moment. I will not occupy myself either with the past or with the future, unless at least it shall be necessary to do so in order to do more perfectly what God is asking of me at the present moment.

When I am seeking God alone, the rest will cause me neither joy nor sorrow. To enjoy perfect repose, we must belong entirely to God. Until I have entirely abandoned and delivered myself up to him, I shall be always divided, always unquiet, and consequently always in trouble.

In all my undertakings, I will act without eagerness, with peace and liberty of spirit: I will neglect nothing, but at the same time I will be content to succeed in nothing: I will keep my heart closed to both the joy and the sorrow which passing events may cause me.

If through any fault or through over-eagerness or embarrassment, I lose my state of peace and holy

liberty, I will return gently and fully to my interior peace; I will look on all things with an equal mind, whether they be agreeable or distasteful, gains or losses, good or bad success; and I will keep for what grates upon nature the joy which it is tempted to feel in what is flattering.

I will bring all possible diligence to what reason and faith, but never nature, say and do in me. It is nature which complains and makes us say: *I have a headache, I have worked very hard, I am tired to death.* Such language only befits the meanness of an immortified nature which seeks its consolation in compassion from its neighbour.

I will perform in a spiritual manner those actions which are in themselves less spiritual, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, warming myself, walking out; in this way S Paul desires that those who use this world should live as detached and disengaged from all things visible as though they used it not.

God in his goodness desires from me an entire detachment from all that flatters the mind, the heart and the senses; he wants an entire acquiescence in all that mortifies the carnal man. This detachment raises the soul above all that is pleasing, and this acquiescence subjects it to all that is displeasing.

A soul in purgatory lives without light, because it does not see God; without joy because it does not possess him: but it is fully and constantly submissive to his orders. My life ought to be a continual purgatory. I consent to live without light, and without joy, but I will be faithful and submissive; this is the road by which God desires to lead me.

The eight days' retreat to which the rule obliges me is the entrance into a solitude more vast and more durable. Exterior solitude does not befit either my state or my occupations. But the more I am obliged to go forth, the more will I try to bury myself in my interior solitude. Yes, I want to live so much alone within myself and so separated from all creatures that

God alone shall dwell with me in the cell of my heart; God alone, with whom I will converse. If anything perishable and created should remain there, I should not belong to God alone.

Punish, Lord, punish my pride, that is but right; but do not punish it in your anger by granting its desires; this would ruin me: punish it in your mercy, by depriving it of what it wants; this is to destroy it and bring it back to its duty.

Let each one ask of you, my God, what he most desires; for myself I ask of you my entire annihilation: let my portion on earth be to honour your divine humiliations by mine.

I will yield in everything and to everyone; I will be well content to get the worst of it in every encounter, and I will see with pleasure the advice and the plans of others preferred to mine. I will do all the good I can, and appear as little as possible; I will rejoice to pass for a man who has neither wisdom, talents nor power; to have neither credit nor authority; to love dependence; to be alone, not that I may be alone with myself, but that God alone should be with me; this is the death and the life that God asks of me.

To be seen when it may gain me some confusion, to hide from what will bring me honour; not to avoid the one nor seek the other, this is what I wish constantly to practise.

I have none of the talents necessary to render my neighbour the spiritual services of which he may stand in need; neither do I deserve that God should bestow upon me these talents nor that he should bless my poor work. Nevertheless, by his mercy, I feel a real desire for the good and advancement of my neighbour. What is to be done in such circumstances? Two things. 1. When there shall present itself any opportunity for setting on foot some work for the greater glory of God, I will start it on its way, set the labourers to work and then hide and withdraw

myself as much as possible. 2. I will rejoice in the happiness and good fortune of those who are succoured by others than myself; for I am persuaded that the work of God will succeed incomparably better in the hands of others than in mine.

I reflect too much on my own incapacity and I have not enough generosity. For the most part, I look on myself as a convalescent after a long sickness. I ought to beware of this fault which may greatly hinder me from doing good, whether it be want of humility or want of courage and confidence in God. Without losing sight of my poverty and misery, I must raise my eyes and keep them fixed on the power of God, on the strength of his grace, and count on his help.

I desire to set myself at liberty and expand my heart in God by an entire confidence in his goodness and protection. Henceforth I will walk in the way of perfection with an entire pouring out of my soul into God, instead of wrapping myself up too closely in myself as I have hitherto done. This pouring out will destroy and annihilate the limits of the creature in its enterprises and operations, detach it from itself and oblige it to lose itself in God.

The life of Jesus Christ is nothing but a tissue of instructions for his ministers; if they are faithful in carrying them out, they will always keep their mind humble and their heart peaceful.

1. Jesus Christ lay hidden for thirty years in a workshop, and only spent three years in preaching. Taught by this example, I will be content either to be entirely forgotten or to be called but seldom to the service of my neighbour.

2. Let others be all the fashion; may brilliant success be their lot; let their direction be to the taste of many persons known for their virtue and rank; for myself, I will choose by preference the lot of Jesus Christ my model. He tasted little success in his preaching; few attached themselves to his person;

while he did good to everyone, he scarcely won any return in this life but scorn and contempt.

3. Determined to follow the footprints of the Incarnate God, the will of him who has sent me shall be my joy, my consolation and my nourishment, both in rest and in labour. This is all I desire, this is all I seek; I leave the rest in the hands of God, I consent to have neither success nor reputation.

The more I study myself, the more I recognize that I am the least of all men in virtue, prudence and merit. It is just that order should be observed and I will be content therewith. Thus I will put myself under the feet of everyone, I will keep myself there constantly, never quitting my place; I will rejoice when others are preferred before me; I will believe myself honoured in conversing with persons who are repulsive and of low degree, and I will willingly serve them in any way in my power.

When one lives without position, without consideration in the world, one is regarded as useless, one is easily forgotten and despised by one's friends. What good fortune this is, what a short cut for reaching God! It is better for us that our friends should be a subject for affliction than affection. When we lose them, we lose a great support for our self-love. In truth, the blow which takes them from us, especially if they are virtuous, is very hard to nature; for this very reason it is the more precious.

I ought always to live without a will of my own, in order that the will of God may reign in me, that it may decide for me both exterior things, such as my employments, my dwelling, my health and my life; and for my interior, that is, the state of my soul, and the degree of my perfection. In submission to this divine will which I adore, I will see without jealousy others more advanced in grace than myself, who will in consequence be higher than myself in glory.

After my death the orders of your divine justice, my God, will be absolutely executed in my regard.

May the designs of your love and mercy be perfectly accomplished in me in this life. I abandon myself to your will to-day as I shall one day be abandoned to your justice. Nay more, I give myself up to-day to your justice and submit myself to all the sufferings you shall ordain for me in reparation for my infidelities. Exercise upon me the just rigours of your love in order that I may fufil the designs of your love.

Love divine is the goal which I set before myself. God in his goodness desires to fill my heart to its full capacity with this heavenly fire. May his will in this be perfectly accomplished, and in the manner in which he wills it.

The means to arrive at this happy and glorious end are as follows:—

1. As far as is possible, with the help of grace, to open my heart to love, that God may take possession of it. This is what I am doing at present with all the ardour of which I am capable; it is what I mean to do all the rest of my life. I give myself up for ever to the power and empire of love.

2. To join to this abandonment an ardent desire of growing and perfecting myself day by day in love. Continual abandonment to love, continual desire of love, this is the true life of the heart.

3. To annihilate every idea, every feeling which is useless for the glory of God, and only to preserve those which are for the interest of God alone. If my love has nothing sensible in it, I shall none the less work with zeal to destroy in myself all that is purely human.

4. To endure what I cannot annihilate and to suffer it because love wills it. This submission is a continual exercise of love and a continual abandonment to love.

5. To use frequent aspirations of love, and to vary them according to the impressions of grace. Sometimes to desire love, and implore it to establish its

reign in my heart; sometimes to complain because it seems to scorn the victim offered to it, or at least that it does not cast upon it some sparks of its sacred fire; sometimes by a thousand protestations to assure it of my entire submission to its will.

6. Willingly to embrace all that is repugnant and mortifying to nature. The more one destroys and annihilates it, the more is the empire of love strengthened and established.

7. To address myself to the Blessed Virgin, to S Joseph, to S Mary Magdalen, to the holy Apostles, to obtain the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

8. In every change of office or work, in the different happenings of life, to remain always interiorly in dependence on love.

What am I? The last and most miserable of all men. Thus, full of contempt for myself, full of respect for others, I will treat everyone with sincere cordiality, and I will have an equal charity for all.

God forbid that the evil deeds of my neighbour should be the rule of my behaviour in his regard! Never will I give him subject for complaint, and I will always suffer with patience the subjects for complaint which he may give me against him.

Study ought never to steal from charity the time it demands. Usually I will attend to those who are actually present in preference to those who are absent. If it should be necessary to write to these latter some letters of instruction, I will be careful that those present are assisted by someone else, or by myself at another time, as prudence shall require.

My charity, gentleness and compassion ought to be greater as the sins of my neighbour are more grievous and his needs more pressing.

The contradiction, raillery and contempt which zeal so often experiences shall only serve, by the mercy of God, to redouble my charity. On such occasions I will seek how I can act and what I can do to serve the authors of the contradictions. I will love and

serve them as my good and true friends.

In the life of every man there are two times which particularly require of him holy dispositions: that of approaching death, because he is then about to appear before Jesus Christ: and that of Holy Communion, because he is about to receive him. In the first, he will exercise his justice upon us; in the second, his design is to make us aware of the profusion of his love. The best preparation for appearing before this terrible Judge is to receive him worthily in the Sacrament of his love. I must therefore, every day, eat the flesh of this Lamb as my Viaticum, and every Communion must work in me a mystical death, so that I may no longer live save for Jesus Christ.

There is a certain manner of preaching and conversing with our neighbour which I may call interior. It has its origin in the sentiments of a touched and penetrated heart. It is full of unction, and its effects are usually strong and efficacious. It makes a more vivid impression on the mind than a laboured and well worked-out discourse: it engraves on the hearts of the hearers the truths of which it wants to persuade them, and communicates to them the dispositions of him who speaks. I find, both in my sermons and conversations, that my neighbour is the more edified and touched, the more my soul enjoys in God a more sweet and profound peace, and the more I speak from my heart. This is therefore the only manner in which I wish to speak and act.

RULES OF PERFECTION

BY WHICH A SOUL MAY BE LED TO DIVINE UNION.

The soul is united with God by knowledge and love. Hence the secret of attaining this divine union is to place the mind and heart in a holy void into which creatures cannot penetrate in order to trouble the peace and repose of the soul.

PART I.

Rules for the understanding.

If we could only once for all banish from our mind all images of created things, we should enjoy tranquil repose and perfect liberty. Those things of which I am ignorant make no impression on my mind, whether of joy or sorrow. For if a friend is sick and I do not know of it, it does not trouble me at all; if anyone speaks ill of me and I am not aware of it, it causes me no disquiet. Should Providence enrich or distinguish a relative, this advantage does not touch me in the least as long as I have no knowledge of it. If, then, I can disengage my mind from creatures, it will be in no way occupied with them; it will be free, and I shall be able to apply it entirely to God; I shall act as if there were no one in the wide world but God and myself.

In truth, it is not possible for me to close the gates of my mind to all the ideas to which my senses give birth, and which they necessarily produce. But if, faithful to grace, I turn my mind aside from these ideas, they will be in me as if they were not; they will only be there when and as much as I suffer them to be there, and my mind will enjoy a perfect and profound tranquillity. This repose and tranquillity is so desirable and advantageous that I ought to have a special

esteem for those means by which I may attain to it, and a great zeal for practising them. Here are three general ones, which are easy to a soul touched by a sincere desire for perfection; *to forget everything, to be ignorant of everything, to annihilate everything.* These are general means, they extend to everything, they can be employed in all places and at all times; they are sweet and easy; they do not impose upon us a multiplicity of different acts. Let us consider them successively, one after the other.

I

To forget everything.

Forgetfulness concerns the past. We must forget everything the memory of which is useless, or which comes to us out of season. How many times are we troubled by the memory of what we have seen or felt. Someone has annoyed us, and we were touched to the quick; if we only forget it, the thorn is drawn out of our heart; but if we keep it there by remembrance, it will cause continually renewed sufferings, often more painful than the first affront. Some loss we have experienced may perhaps give us no rest as long as we keep it in our mind, and it is the same with all troublesome affairs.

Since, then, the remembrance of such things serves only to cause us pain and sorrow, we must deliberately stifle the memory of them by a deliberate forgetfulness. This forgetfulness ought to be so general that it extends even to the sins of our past life. We must put them out of mind, supposing that we have made a good general confession, or that we have no good reason to be dissatisfied with our ordinary ones. In that case we should not call to mind the memory of our sins in detail and with their circumstances; for the enemy might take from this occasion to tempt us afresh, or to disquiet us by the thought that perhaps we did not fully relate all the circumstances: we ought to retain only a general

idea of our faults, and remember that we are great sinners. This is sufficient to keep us humble and to rouse us to contrition.

As to any good we have done, we must absolutely forget it; as soon as we have done a good work, we should put it out of mind altogether, or at least think no more of it than if we had never done it. Two reasons make this necessary: First, that any reflection on our good actions may be a cause of vanity; secondly, because it turns us away from the Presence of God and that entire self-abandonment to his will which is the greatest good of which we are capable in this life, and which we can only possess perfectly when our minds are quite free from all images of creatures.

II

To be ignorant of everything.

This ignorance particularly concerns the future, and banishes all curiosity. How often are we troubled and disquieted by a thousand phantoms, either because we are taken up with useless things or because we are indulging pure curiosity! It is the spirit of the world to want to know everything, to be eager for news, and to fill one's mind with useless knowledge. The Spirit of God, on the contrary, leads us to a deliberate ignoring of all that does not help to advance us in God's grace. Happy ignorance, by which the soul acquires a wonderful knowledge of divine things, frees itself from all that can trouble its repose, and gives it such complete mastery over the mind that it can dispose of it as it will, and apply it to whatsoever it desires.

Let all our endeavour, then, be to be faithful to God, to banish all fear, to keep ourselves peacefully in the bosom of divine Providence, like little children sleeping peacefully in their mothers' arms, without thought for the morrow.

III

To annihilate everything.

This maxim regards those things which have already taken possession of our mind, either in spite of ourselves, or because we have given them entrance. For example, you are tempted to a rash judgement; if you dwell ever so little on this thought, it will have on your mind the same effect as a seal on wax; it will make an impression which you will find it difficult to efface; you must annihilate it the moment you are conscious of it. Or you have committed a fault, and you amuse yourself by reflecting upon it, dallying with it in a way which often only serves to flatter self-love. Annihilate this reflection, and turn your mind immediately to God simply and lovingly, without disquieting yourself or losing courage; make an act of contrition, and think no more about your fault until it is time for the evening examen, when you must recall it in order to make your review with exactitude. Lastly, we must in general annihilate everything in our mind the thought of which does not contribute to our spiritual advancement.

We may get some light on this manner of annihilating our ideas by comparing the mind with an eye. When I look at any object, its image is depicted on the back of my eye. What shall I do to efface this image? Nature itself furnishes two means: it teaches me either to turn my eyes upon some other object or to close them altogether. I can in the same way efface and annihilate the idea and image of an object, either by turning away the eyes of my attention, or by raising them and fixing them entirely on God. I am aware that the mind does not obey as readily as the eye; but what is there that grace cannot render possible and even easy? Since, then, it is a question of annihilating in our mind everything created, a soul which aspires to divine union will begin by despising this earth as the place

of its exile, and will form a strong resolution to live already and by advance in heaven, its true country. If, however, by reason of the necessary dependence of the soul on the body, ideas of visible and fleeting things find place in the mind, it will not deign to cast a single voluntary glance upon them, but will only use them as so many steps by which it may be raised to the consideration of things invisible and eternal.

Happy state! This void of all that neither is God nor leads to God, in proportion as it is perfected in a soul, weakens the sources of our temptations, for the devil cannot enter the will except through the mind. If, then, the mind is emptied of all things created, how can the enemy attack the will? Further, by this same means we are guaranteed against those illusions which spring from the imagination, because we place it in the same void as the mind. We thus enter upon the straightest and shortest way by which we may receive the communications of God, for there is nothing now in the soul to impede his action. He never acts more directly, nor speaks more familiarly and intimately to the soul than when the mind is tranquil and undisturbed by thoughts of creatures.

PART II.

Rules for the Will.

If the rules here given for the understanding were exactly practised, it would scarcely be necessary to give any for the will. But alas! sin has so weakened the powers of the soul that often it is beyond our power absolutely to put away thoughts that have seized upon us in spite of ourselves: after having annihilated them two or three times, they return just as importunately; our passions are sometimes so violently moved that it is impossible for us to calm them immediately. The remedy for all this is comprised in these two words, *detachment*, *acquiescence*.

I

Detachment.

Detachment ought to be universal. As we ought to try to annihilate in our mind all that does not come from the spirit of God, so ought we to detach our will from the tumult of all its passions, and those impressions which are excited in us by every spirit contrary to God.

In order better to understand the practice of this maxim, it should be noticed that the will is attacked by two kinds of temptations; some we may call sweet and attractive; others distressing or afflicting. The first arise from such things as are pleasing to the senses or the soul; the others come from what is troublesome and contrary to our inclinations. As an example of the first kind we may take the desire of looking at some pleasant and seductive object which flatters our lower nature; for the second we may take a movement of antipathy or aversion for someone whose disposition is disagreeable to us, or with whom we are annoyed. As soon as you experience such attacks, let the desire of preserving intact the perfect purity of your heart be immediately aroused; fly promptly and without delay from all temptations which are accompanied by pleasure; resist generously all those which may trouble the peace of your soul: calm your heart as much as possible with the help of grace, and do not let it for one moment be steeped in the bitterness of the passion which agitates you.

II

Acquiescence.

If, in spite of your efforts to free your will from these temptations, they continue to persecute you, the remedy is to acquiesce, not in the temptation, but in the will of God, which permits you to feel their importunity. Distinguish two things in these

temptations; the evil of the *guilt* which they propose, which is contrary to the will of God; and the pain of humiliation which they cause, which comes by permission of God. For example, if the devil solicits you to vengeance, the evil which you are tempted to will to your neighbour is what is forbidden by God; but the hurt and the pain which is caused by the importunity of the suggestion is what God permits. The first ought to be the object of your hatred, and never must you consent to it; as regards the second, you must acquiesce in it humbly and peacefully, and say to yourself interiorly: *I wish no ill to this person: however, God permits the temptation to do so to harass and weary me incessantly. I adore his holy will; I receive from his hand the pain and torment which I suffer; I submit to it with all my heart, and I do not wish to be delivered from it until he please.* By this acquiescence, the soul will enjoy great peace and make marvellous progress. It is only necessary to bring to the observance of these rules great exactitude and great fidelity even to the minutest details, for they are the means of keeping the mind and heart always in perfect detachment. And lastly, we must never be discouraged on account of any faults we may have committed against the maxims we have laid down, for *discouragement is the ruin of spirituality.* Our faults ought to serve to establish us in confidence in God; and the more we recognize our own weaknesses, the more reason we have to put our whole trust in God.

Thus we see that the acquiescence of the will extends to everything, sin excepted. We must accept all sorts of occupations and pains, from whatever quarter they come, however great they may be or however long they may last; contradictions, rebuffs, contempt, interior trials and aridities, sorrows and grief.

It is an error to think that those who are entirely resigned to the will of God experience neither weari-

ness nor sorrow. When our Saviour in the garden of Olives was sorrowful even unto death, was he thereby less perfect and less resigned to the will of his Father? Sorrow is not then incompatible with perfection when we know how to use it. It is also an abuse to believe that we are losing our time in prayer when the facility of speaking with God is withdrawn from us. In the greatest dryness and when it seems impossible to meditate or stabilize our mind in the presence of God, we can yet make an excellent prayer. By a sincere submission to the will of God, who is the author of this painful state, we often glorify God more perfectly than when we experience much facility in prayer and feelings of tender devotion.

Of the Attraction of Divine Grace.

An important point in the spiritual life is to be well aware by what attraction grace seeks to enter into our heart, in what manner it desires to make itself master, and to bring it into that state in which it ought to be, or which God wills for it. In order to attain to this knowledge, try to find out what lights usually penetrate your mind both in and out of prayer, by what touches and impressions your heart is most strongly moved. It is in such lights, and in these sudden and unexpected impressions, often recurring and without any particular occasion, that the attraction of grace consists.

For beginners and those who are entering on the path of true piety, their attraction will be a desire to do penance, to become detached from the world, to draw nearer to God, to abandon themselves into the hands of his Providence.

The attraction of grace which is proper to those who are more advanced in piety usually shews itself by lively feelings of loving contrition, or a gentle sorrow that they do so little for the glory of God; by an ardent desire to belong entirely to him, by a profound self-abasement, by a more vivid and

intimate realization of the presence of God, or by some other impression that moves and penetrates the substance of the soul.

Lastly, everyone who desires to walk seriously in the footsteps of Jesus Christ ought to take up his cross, or rather, to share it with him. Let each, then, if he desires to recognize the particular attraction of grace for himself, examine in which of the practices of religion he finds most support for his weakness. It may be in the spirit of penance, the desire to make satisfaction to the outraged justice of God; or in a humble submission to his judgements, a generous abandonment to his Providence, in an entire acquiescence in his holy will. Or again, in the love of Jesus Christ, a great esteem of the cross and of those blessings which accompany it; or in the spirit of sacrifice, of self-annihilation, and an entire surrender of one's whole being into the hands of God. Once one has realized by what road grace desires to lead us, then the great secret of the spiritual life is to enter generously on this way, to walk in it with great constancy, pulling oneself up unceasingly as soon as one is aware of having gone astray, and leaving oneself to be guided with docility by the Holy Spirit, who speaks to each soul by the voice of some particular attraction. It is, then, my business to follow up my own special grace, and to carry my own particular cross.

Jesus Christ has attached to the cross his grace and his spirit: I must, therefore, let the cross enter into my heart and dwell there; with it will enter grace and divine love. These three things can never be separated, since a suffering God has united them in one.

This interior attraction leads us to God more surely than any exterior means, for it is God himself who insinuates it gently into the soul, and by means of it softens the heart, ravishes it, gains its love, and afterwards does whatever he will with it.

THE PATH WHICH LEADS TO HAPPINESS IN THIS LIFE

Everyone desires to be happy. The natural and unconquerable desire of our own happiness is the principle and centre of all our activity in this life. Speaking generally, this desire conducts all men by two broad roads, leading in exactly opposite directions. Some people imagine that they will reach their goal by running after riches, pleasures and honours. They are deceived. While seeking good fortune, they are flying from it; the most astonishing thing is that their own experience does not destroy the fascination of natural and passing worldly delights. Yet the search after them, their possession, their preservation, all is nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. The desire of some good whose possession does not depend on ourselves is inseparable from the fear of not succeeding in our pursuits. Now, desire and fear are the two executioners which torture the soul, two worms which devour it incessantly. Still more, even the enjoyment of these temporal goods, far from filling the capacity of the heart and satisfying its hunger, only serves to sharpen its appetite. Never is cupidity satisfied; it consumes a man with new desires, new endeavours to multiply pleasures and increase his fortune: lastly, it often costs even more to keep what we have got than to acquire it. These truths are known to the whole world by constant and universal experience. Never are our passions satisfied.

Certain philosophers of the wiser and more

enlightened sort have recognized and taught that the only way of finding that happiness for which the soul sighs so ardently is to control our passions, to extinguish the desires of concupiscence and to despise the false and seductive glory of those deceptive goods held out to us by this world. This was practised with ostentatious pride by Crates, Diogenes and their followers. Such a means is evidently the most direct, since it cuts off a thousand embarrassments and a thousand annoyances unknown to upright mediocrity. It is evidently the easiest; for we can detach ourselves from visible things and scorn them. It is evidently the only one which can lead us to the goal. He who desires nothing, fears nothing; and moreover, superior to tempests and storms, he enjoys perfect calm. Philosophy caught a glimpse of this wise and happy man, but could not produce him.

What I have just said I wish to apply to Christians who, illuminated by faith, and led by divine grace, seek happiness in the only object which can satisfy the infinite need of our soul; I mean God. All tend to the same end, but all do not walk by the same road.

The greater number give themselves to a multiplicity of practices: they pin their devotion some to one thing, some to another; they burthen themselves with a great multiplicity of acts and desires. In all this there is nothing blameworthy although it is our own choice, or taste, I would almost say caprice which, according to the character of each one, varies these practices and devotions. Some, by a simple and entire abandonment of themselves, give up, so to speak, all care of themselves, laying it upon God. Abandoning themselves utterly to the disposition of his Providence, they stifle within them every desire save that of the will of God, and are able to express nothing but this one short word: *May your will, my God, be done in me who am but earth, as it is done*

in heaven, promptly, fully and with joy. Nevertheless, when I say that they stifle in themselves every desire, God forbid that I should be thought to mean, with the false mystics, that they renounce the desire of their own perfection, their salvation, and the help of God! His will, which alone they desire, is our sanctification by his grace in this world and our happiness in the other.

Although this path of renunciation is the shortest, although all the world can walk in it, although it delivers the soul from trouble and from all embarrassment, yet it is not the one most commonly followed. We always want to preserve and save from shipwreck, so to speak, some shreds of our own will and judgement. There is nothing so difficult to get rid of as the operations of nature. If we would find God perfectly, we must die entirely to ourselves in the arms of God, abandoning ourselves to him without reserve, making him our master that he may work in us according to his good pleasure, saying to him in Our Lord's words: *In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum.* "That is to say," says S Francis de Sales: "My Father, I place my soul in your hands, that you may do with it whatever you please."

A soul which has thus resigned itself into the hands of God has found the true happiness of life. It possesses temporal happiness because it lives disengaged from all things earthly, without fear and without desire: it possesses spiritual happiness, because, no longer regarding itself but letting God will in and for it whatever he pleases, it lives in a pure and unshakable tranquillity: it has no other care in this world than to live in this entire abandonment to God. Thus freed from a multiplicity of desires, fears, reflections and restless operations, established in the repose of simple dependence on God, it enjoys the most complete and constant happiness that can be obtained in this life. It has reached the goal to

which others are tending by turnings and windings which so lengthen and hinder the journey that many never reach the goal at all.

In this state of perfect abandonment, we may practise excellently the perfection of those two words which epitomize morality and mortification, *abstine, sustine;* abstain, suffer. *Abstine.* No longer to seek our own convenience and satisfaction; we have placed them in the hands of God, we leave to him the whole care and disposition. *Sustine.* To abandon ourselves willingly to suffering, with a full and constant resignation to the guidance of God. Thus, attached to nothing and fearing nothing, we pursue our ordinary path along the straight way of simple conformity to the will of God: the more we advance, the less are we shaken or distracted by the things of earth.

Let me add that we have now much greater power of action. As in winter bodies are more robust than in summer, because in winter the blood and the warmth of our bodies are drawn more into the heart, which is the principle of life, so souls established in the denial of their own will and in the sole desire of the will of God, gather up all their strength into one only act which is the principle of their inner life; usually these souls perform the acts of the different virtues in a much more vigorous and elevated manner than those whose powers are divided amongst many acts and purposes, although good and praiseworthy in themselves. This is the means of resting in the hands of God after the same fashion as S Ignatius wishes us to rest in the hands of our superiors, like a dead body or a dry stick. Not only have they no movement contrary to that of him who would dispose of them, but they have no movement at all of their own. Thus we ought to be so perfectly submissive to our superiors that we should not only have neither will nor judgement contrary to their will and judgement, but we leave it to our superiors to will and

judge for us all that they think best, leaving ourselves to their guidance in blind obedience. In the same way, I say, will a soul entirely dead to self act with regard to God. It leaves God and its superiors to dispose of it, and to judge for it all that they please, and receives without resistance all the movements of obedience and of the spiritual life, trusting no more to its own guidance than a blind man who abandons himself entirely into the hands of his guide.

For the rest, we must not fear that we are idle and are doing nothing. In truth, we will nothing of our own volition; but we will everything on which we see the seal and character of the divine will. All the attention of this soul is fixed on whatever it is doing, because then God is asking nothing else of it; but its heart, by its preparation, extends to all and embraces all.

Those words of our Lord, that whosoever abandons for him houses and brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children and lands, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall have for inheritance life eternal, are justified in regard of all that we forsake for God. Whoever forsakes himself for God, whoever for his love renounces the pleasures and satisfactions of the senses, the esteem and glory of men, the care of his own well-being and his health, finds, by means of this abandonment, a hundredfold more peace, sweetness and contentment than worldlings can ever find in the pursuit and possession of these so-called advantages. Thus did S Augustine find far more pleasure in the tears he shed at the feet of Jesus Christ than he had ever tasted in the foolish joys of the world: thus did David experience in his heart consolations more sweet and abundant the more generous had been his renunciation. Whoever has no other design than that of carrying out the will of God finds a hundredfold more consolation in doing what God wills of him and what obedience enjoins

than he would have found in doing his own will.

Let us put this into practice; we shall in time experience the truth of our Lord's promise.

But what is still more advantageous and desirable is that not only do we receive the hundredfold of all we forsake, but in addition to that we give God a hundredfold; that is to say, we give a hundred times more glory to God, the will of God is accomplished in us a hundredfold more perfectly, and God reigns in us with a hundredfold more empire; thus the more we leave for God, the more we find in God, the more happy and content are we with God and for God.

VARIOUS EQUALITIES

IN WHICH ALL PERFECTION IS CONTAINED.

1. There ought to be equality between
   - The graces of God and my correspondence,
   - My knowledge and my will,
   - My will and its fulfilment,
   - My resolutions and their execution,
   - My obligations and my actions,
   - My nothingness and my self-annihilation.
   - The worth and value of things and my esteem of them,
   - The merit of the object and my love for it.
2. I ought to have equal
   - Separation from every kind of sin,
   - Care to sanctify all my actions,
   - Application to the beginning, progress and end of all I do for God.
   - Exactitude for all my rules,
   - Charity for all sorts of persons,
   - Fervour for all virtues,
   - Good-temper and equanimity in all events and at all times.
3. I must have equal indifference for and disposition to
   - Every kind of place and employment,

Every kind of cross and suffering,
Every kind of treatment on the part of creatures; remembrance or oblivion, esteem or contempt, affection or aversion.
Every kind of treatment on the part of God: light or darkness, consolation or aridity.
Rest or labour,
Health or sickness,
Life or death,
For all that God wills that I should be or not be; either in nature or grace or in glory hereafter.

VARIOUS EXERCISES

REQUIRED BY PERFECTION.

Perfection requires that we always have
More humility than humiliations,
More patience than crosses,
More obedience than we receive commands,
More deeds than words,
More good-will than deeds,
More love than action,
More care of the soul than of the body,
More application to sanctity than to health,
More abandonment to all things than abandonment of all things.

To read and meditate these equalities and excesses with profit we must (1) well understand and penetrate the meaning of each, (2) we must persuade ourselves that we are able to practise the perfection contained in the maxims we have just read; that God wills this, and that he offers us the grace necessary for it; that at our death he will require a strict account of them, and that he will reward or punish us according to the good or bad use we have made of them; that it is not only to-day, but for a long time past, that he has asked this perfection of us, and that we are still far from it by our own fault and tepidity. This presupposed:—

1. I will thank God for all the graces he has hitherto bestowed upon me for the practice of this perfection.

2. I will sincerely recognize the bad use I have made of them, humbly asking pardon.

3. I will do my utmost to put myself in the dispositions God demands, earnestly resolving to make a good use of the help he still deigns to offer me in spite of so much resistance.

4. To strengthen myself more solidly in this resolution, I will enter into the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary; I will read there in indelible characters the rules of conduct I intend to follow: the sight of them there will redouble my ardour for them. I will pray, I will implore both Son and Mother to bless my undertaking; animated by a firm confidence in their protection, I will enter courageously upon the practice of the grand and sublime maxims by which God wills that I should govern my life.

ADVICE FOR A SOUL

TO WHOM GOD HAS SENT GRIEVOUS TRIALS.

The state of uneasiness and abandonment in which you are at present, even anxiety as to your eternal salvation, is in truth a state of loss, not of salvation, but of the lights, consolations, enjoyment, support and assurance which nature seeks after and relinquishes with extreme reluctance. It is a painful state, but one useful in purifying the heart. This is what you have to do.

1. Do not desire that your troubles should diminish or end speedily. If our Lord wants your soul to be sorrowful even unto death, bless his adorable will, and in spite of the repugnance of nature, submit with a good will.

2. Do not seek exterior consolations, not even those which are spiritual; if God gives you any from time to time, do not attach yourself to them nor make any effort to increase, enjoy or prolong them.

3. Provided that you always keep in the bottom of your heart an inviolable resolution of never offending God, leave God to dispose of you as he pleases, for time and eternity.

4. God wills to give you by means of this trial a faith without light, a hope without support, a love without enjoyment, that is without your feeling the light or support or the enjoyment of virtue. By means of this deprivation, they become more spiritual and more pure.

5. Believe firmly all that is told you, although your experience may seem to contradict it; assure yourself that you are not the first who has been in

this state. No, certainly not: we have seen and still see many like it.

6. I willingly make myself your guarantee with our Lord, and I have no doubt that one day by his infinite bounty you will possess him in heaven.

7. Watch carefully against those faults into which your state of trouble may easily make you fall; such as giving way to your feelings, speaking sharply, being less docile to obedience, having too much compassion for yourself, stopping to reflect on yourself and your troubles.

8. Have a great esteem for this state, and thank our Lord for having made use of this means to destroy your pride, and to reduce you to the condition you ought to be in, that is, your own nothingness.

9. Remain willingly in this dry and profound nothingness, never asking to be taken out of it, in life or death.

10. This state is a participation of that of Jesus Christ, when on the cross he said to his Father: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Notice here that our Lord was without doubt forsaken by his Father, since he said so; nevertheless, he abandoned himself also: to whom? To him by whom he had just said he was abandoned. He abandoned himself to him, saying: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* Our Lord, although forsaken by his Father, could have helped himself, since he was God. But no: his Father abandons him, he abandons himself also. Apply this to yourself, and you will endure whatever God wills. It seems to you that God has abandoned you; even if that were so, he would never treat you as he treated his only Son. God having abandoned you, as it seems, what are you to do? Nothing else than abandon yourself, like our Lord, to him who has, it seems, abandoned you: if he wills to leave you in this abandonment even till your death, as he left his Son, continue till

your death, like his Son, to abandon yourself to your Father; remain thus abandoned by him and by yourself, in his hands, as did Jesus Christ.

ADVICE FOR A SOUL

WHOM GOD DRAWS TO THE STATE OF SIMPLE RECOLLECTION AND PURE LOVE.

I

We reach God by the annihilation of ourselves. Hold yourself down so low that you can no longer find or even see yourself.

In the measure in which you banish from your heart all that is not God, you will fill yourself with God. Do not look at yourself; forget yourself, separate yourself from yourself. Where you no longer find yourself, you will find God.

The practice of perfect annihilation consists in having no other care than that of dying entirely to self and to all the operations of nature so as to leave room for God to live and work in us.

To submit oneself thus to God by a total abandonment of self, and to lose oneself in the abyss of one's nothingness, in order to no longer find anything but God, this is to perform the most excellent act of which we are capable, and which contains in itself the substance of all the other virtues. This is the "one thing necessary" which our Lord recommends in the Gospel.

O rich void, into which the more a soul plunges itself the more precious it becomes in the sight of God; the less it has of what is human, created, sensible, imaginary, and all that is its own, the more it has from God, the more rich it is in God.

To lose yourself in this void is the surest means of finding yourself in God. If you cease to be what you are, you will soon come to be what you are not, and what God wills that you should be. We may

understand this from those beautiful words of S Paul to the Colossians: *You are dead, and your life is hid with Jesus Christ in God.* And again to the Philippians: *To die is gain.* And to the Galatians: *I live; or rather it is no longer I that live, but it is Jesus Christ who lives in me.*

Remain then, as far as possible, in a state of death, insensible to everything of this world, to all the changes and all the events of life, like the dead who are in the tomb.

II

Let your exercise be a simple remembrance of God, a humble and loving acquiescence of heart to the will of God. By this one exercise you will avoid every evil, and you will obtain everything profitable.

Remain constantly lost and annihilated, without troubling to do anything else. If the body suffer, if the imagination flutter about, if the mind babble, silence of heart to all that; no violent effort, no studied artifice: eternal acquiescence, silence, abandonment, annihilation, it is all one. Remain in the simplicity spoken of in the little book of the "Reliques de S François de Sales."

Always practise the docility of a child: place yourself in the abyss, and take pleasure in seeing yourself profoundly buried in it: acquiesce willingly in the confusion and annihilation of yourself, and be persuaded that you will never annihilate yourself as much as you ought. *Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. xviii, 2.)

We need not distinguish between repose and labour, either interior or exterior. It is all one when we keep ourselves in acquiescence and interior repose. Note this carefully.

You must renounce all complaints about the aridity and dryness of your heart; you must, so to speak, lose sight of it, as well as all your other interior

pains. This dryness and insensibility purifies the soul from its own tastes and self-seeking. Simple acquiescence of heart is the only thing to which you may cling. The teaching you have received and your own experience are enough to make you know how to keep yourself without activity, without effort, without multiplicity.

Did it ever occur to you, during the years you have passed in ignorance of this kind of life, so free, so detached, so disinterested, that you would ever know of it in this world? And now that God has made it known to you, what an infidelity it would be to leave it, and to attach yourself to any other thing but God alone! Let everything then be for you purely nothing, let God alone be in you: thus will you find in nothingness your all.

Your manner of treating with creatures ought to be infinitely removed from all tenderness and sensibility. It is inconceivable how small a thing may suffice to arrest the progress of the soul, and that for long, even a whole lifetime. A mere trifle is capable of hindering admirable progress which we might be making in grace. In order to communicate himself to souls God requires great freedom from all the self-seeking of nature, even in the tiniest things.

In every kind of business and in every sort of happening, let all that is not God be to you as nothing, and God your all.

Do not be eager, do not be anxious about anything whatsoever.

We can only do one thing at a time. Do that in which you are actually occupied, without letting what is to follow divide your attention: its time and opportunity will come. On such occasions we must deepen our peace, so that we not only do what must be done, but do it in the way it ought to be done, that is, with peace and liberty of spirit.

To work much, to work little, to act or suffer, no distinction. To all that simple acquiescence, and

equal acquiescence.

For every sort of event, afflictions, sickness, death, losses, equal acquiescence. The senses will rebel, sadness will grip the heart, the thought of the loss we have sustained will pass and repass in the mind: acquiescence to all that. Let God and his holy will be all. Aridity, obscurity, insensibility, pain, abandonment, it is by means of these that we are to lose ourselves.

As to all your sufferings, without too much examining whence they come, accept them in peace: annihilate them, and annihilate yourself with them, to keep yourself in annihilation with regard to everything.

It is in occasions of vexations and contradictions that we practise the most perfect self-spoliation and that we become established in greater confidence in the first cause, by the loss of what is secondary. Acquiescence to the loss of everything save only God.

Lord, grant us the grace thoroughly to understand this perfection, and still more thoroughly to practise it.

When these thoughts of . . . . present themselves to your mind, change them into the thought of being all God's, and abandoning yourself to God. Thus you will remain in yourself, or rather in your nothingness. For the rest, let these thoughts fade away like so many others which come to distract you. Study no longer to find yourself, but remain for ever lost, and cast into that infinite abyss in which there is nothing but the infinite Being and a great emptiness of everything else. Seek no other support but that of your abandonment and confidence.

III

Do not go back to where you started from; I mean, no longer seek human support nor amuse yourself with anything created. Let them take flight and

vanish for ever. No more seeking to satisfy either the senses or the mind or the heart; but indifference and insensibility to everything, with an emptiness and abandonment quite pure and without limits.

Loss of all things without taking anything back, and of yourself more than all the rest, as if you were no longer anything at all. Keep no more hold upon yourself than on a nothing which does not and never will exist. In the loss of all else, God is found and peace; possessing God, enjoying peace, what reason is there to trouble about the rest?

Do not be eager about anything; do not let your heart be troubled about anything whatsoever. Where there is only nothing there is neither eagerness nor trouble, but a peaceful and unchangeable void. In this void you will establish yourself when you have got rid of everything created; you will happily find yourself by ceasing to look for yourself. Let God alone be eternally in you. Lose all that you may find all.

IV

The farther you go on the road you are travelling, the less will you find what you seek. You think to find God by your own efforts. Stop all these violent applications of head, retaining only a simple remembrance of God present and operating in you. So much for your mind. As to your heart, keep it in a gentle acquiescence in the operation of God. Constantly observe this rule and you will find that your heart will be filled with God, will be expanded in God, and will be governed by God.

Bring yourself back to that unity which is God. All that is apart from that is not at all what you are seeking. If you well know how to content yourself with that eminent unity, you will not trouble yourself at all about all the rest. How many things does this unity, well understood and practised, retrench, even

things that seem to us good, holy and necessary, but which are in reality hurtful to us, instead of helping us to reach the goal of our desires, which is to be made one thing with the supreme unity.

Let your motto then be this saying of Blessed Giles of Assisi; *One to one.* One soul to one God. Go still further and lose yourself in this unity. Forget everything, remember only unity. Divine unity, infinite unity, God alone.

This word *Unity* is very luminous. It will make you retrench all superfluous multiplicities. It is very efficacious for bringing you to all that God wills of you. In this short word you will find treasures of light, grace and innocence.

SPIRITUAL MAXIMS

I

On Humility.

Whoever aspires to perfection ought to rejoice in what mortifies nature most sensibly: (1) When he is treated harshly; (2) when he is blamed and his actions and all that concerns him are scorned; (3) when he is forgotten and his needs neglected; (4) when aversion is shewn for him and those dear to him; (5) when his desires are unheeded, however just they may be.

When a soul is faithful to grace in humiliations, contempt, neglect, it has found a Paradise, a peace and repose which surpass all description; no creature whatever can hurt it.

If there is anything to choose, it ought to be of the meanest and most laborious employments.

Nothing makes me so contemptible as the horror I have of contempt. There is no harm in contempt except my refusal to suffer it.

When I humiliate myself, it is only a shadow of humility if I do not consent with a good will to be humiliated by others.

Great humility willingly endures great contempt; lesser humility willingly endures lesser contempt. If then I will not suffer the least contempt, I have not even the lowest degree of humility; in so far as I am devoid of humility, I am full of pride.

I shall only advance in perfection in so far as I consent to remain in abjection.

Innocence, simplicity, the frankness of childhood,

these make up the idea of humility of Jesus and his saints.

He who gains his point by twists and turnings is by no means a child.

He who cannot follow the will and inclination of others is no child either.

He who is touchy over little slights, who incessantly turns over in his mind small offences, is as far from Jesus Christ as he is little conformed to the simplicity of childhood.

We are scarcely competent to labour ourselves at the work of our own annihilation. We are too weak against ourselves and too indulgent towards our faults.

But when God sets his hand to the work, he makes use of ourselves and our miseries to humiliate us; it is our part to submit to this treatment with perfect good will. Let my body then be afflicted with sickness; my honour tarnished; let me be esteemed at my true worth; let me remain hidden in my nothingness: so long as I consent to these annihilations, that is enough.

II

On Temptations.

A truly faithful soul draws the same fruit from temptations to evil as from inspirations to good.

The great profit of temptation consists in drawing from it the contrary good to its full extent, and with all the good will of which we are capable.

The imperfect succumb to the smallest occasions of evil, the perfect triumph in the greatest.

In temptations of the senses we must raise our mind to the greatness of God. In temptations of mind, such as vanity, and envy, we must abase ourselves in the infinite abyss of our nothingness.

The means of triumphing over temptations to pleasure, of whatever nature they may be, is to apply

oneself seriously to love and embrace crosses. Until we have given ourselves wholeheartedly to this practice, we shall be continually fluctuating between pleasure and the cross, between temptation and victory; we shall be in danger of succumbing to the wiles of the tempter; we shall only resist negligently; at least our heart will be troubled and violently agitated. Why? Because we have not that indifference to pleasure which we can and ought to gain from a true love of the cross.

There is yet another manner of combating temptations of the senses, that is, by annihilation of mind and acquiescence of heart to the orders of God. Thus S Paul *gloried in his infirmities, that the power of God might dwell in him;* that is, that the grace of his Saviour alone might reign in him, and that he recognized that of himself he was nothing but misery.

There are three methods of overcoming temptation, either by elevation, by self-abasement or by recourse to the cross.

The inclination to evil is not a sin. It may become an exercise of virtue, from which great profit may be drawn. In order to do this, we must practise two things, abandonment and fidelity: abandonment, in suffering this state; fidelity in persevering in our duty.

In attractive temptations, purity of heart.
In those which cause affliction, patience.
In those which discourage our heart, confidence.
In those which elevate our mind, humility.

III

On Sufferings.

In our sufferings let us be well persuaded that what crucifies us, humbles and sanctifies us. Jesus Christ is a God crucified and crucifying. He has been crucified by his enemies and he crucifies his friends.

In the loss of temporal goods, realize that this loss is a treasure for eternity, and that a single act of resignation to the endurance of poverty is worth more than all the riches of earth.

Crosses and sufferings are the most precious gifts which God gives us in this life; the endurance of crosses and sufferings is also the most precious gift we can make to God on this earth.

My repose ought to be in the want of temporal goods and the endurance of evil.

To suffer without reflecting on creatures or on oneself; in our sufferings to regard only the Prime Cause, who disposes all things by his providence; to look upon our pains and crosses as gifts of inestimable value; to embrace them with eager and ardent love because of the infinite advantages they bring us, or rather the glory they give to God; this is the ideal of a true Christian. Our pains themselves do us less harm than the repugnance we have for them.

IV

Maxims of Prudence.

Never to take counsel with our own passion nor with that of others.

The more passion we have, the less reason.

He who takes counsel of passionate men and fools can only hope to receive advice from them in conformity with their dispositions. If he listens to and follows them, what resolutions can he make but those which are foolish and passionate? This is just what happens to us when we listen to and follow those things which our senses and our passions propose.

Our mind should always be disposed to listen to reason and our heart to receive grace.

Take for your rule in the execution of any plan to employ as few means as possible, and those only which are necessary for its success.

Since the greater number of things in this life

have both a good and a bad side, why should I not choose the good, which is that of virtue?

Let us set ourselves on the side of virtue against our own humour, not on the side of humour against virtue.

It is in myself that the source of my happiness or sorrow lies. Both depend on the manner in which I accept all that happens, and that manner of acceptance depends upon myself.

I never ought to complain of anyone but myself, since all that others do or say against me will turn, if I so choose, to my advantage.

The evil which may be said against us ought only to animate us to the opposite good.

It is important to see of which of the virtues we have some beginning, and how far we can carry them, so that we may always advance, never stopping till we arrive at the goal. By neglecting this wise advice we lag behind, often but too far.

Let us not follow the wrong scent: time is given us in which to labour and suffer, eternity to rest and enjoy.

It is fruitless to strive to raise ourselves to God if we have not first learnt to know and mortify ourselves.

V

On Mortification.

Perfect mortification ought to make me outwardly, deaf, blind and dumb; inwardly, insensible to all that does not touch the interests of God.

Those who when travelling start before dawn and those who continue walking after dark will both find much difficulty.

But the difficulty of the first is not to be compared to that of the second. The former advance towards the day which is about to break, and will soon have full daylight: the latter, on the contrary, the more they advance, the deeper are they plunged in the

darkness of the night until they can no longer see at all and are in danger of falling over some precipice. In the same way, those who withdraw from the guidance of the senses and those who follow it alike walk by an obscure and difficult road: but those who renounce sensual inclinations are always travelling towards the day because they are travelling towards God, who is spirit and light, and they advance in the life of grace, which is a life of spirit and brightness; while those who follow the senses plunge deeper and deeper into darkness and night, because the knowledge and experience which we gain from the senses are low, gross, and incapable of contenting the soul. We must therefore accept willingly the pain inseparable from mortification of the senses: it is at least less than that which comes from satisfying them: the more generous and constant our warfare against them, the more does the pain diminish.

VI

On Detachment from Creatures.

Our strength consists in self-renunciation: the more we have recourse to the shifts of self-love, the more do we weaken ourselves.

Although many things are lawful for us, we ought not to allow anything to become necessary outside the designs of God. Affection for creatures captivates our heart and deprives it of its privilege of true liberty.

Our spirit dwells between two worlds, the sensible and the spiritual. Corrupt nature drags down our spirit from the spiritual world into the degradation of the world of sense. Grace, on the contrary, raises it from the world of sense and elevates it to that which is spiritual. As long as it remains there it is to a certain extent free from the attacks of the flesh, the world and the devil; for albeit the devil is a

spirit, yet he cannot touch our spirit nor injure it except by means of our two other enemies, that is, either by worldly images which stir our imagination or by the sensations he excites in our appetites. Now all that is in the region of the senses. But as soon as our spirit withdraws from its own region into that of the senses, it finds itself exposed to the temptations of all three enemies. Let it remain, then, in its own proper and natural sphere; instead of lowering itself into that of the body and its senses, let it lose itself in that infinite Spirit who is its principle, its term and its centre; let it remain hidden there for ever. Happy is it if it never again separate itself from that sovereign Being, who is always ready to look upon us, to love us and to heap upon us graces and spiritual blessings as long as we remain attached to him.

Those who are solidly spiritual will pass their life in three kinds of actions: (1) In separating themselves from all affection to earthly things; (2) in making themselves indifferent to sensual pleasure; (3) in flying alone to him who is alone, that is, to God.

A soul attached to earth esteems nothing but the things of earth: things spiritual appear to it so small that it scarcely sees them. But if it frees itself from earth, so as to be set at liberty, in proportion as it raises itself towards God will it discover the littleness of earthly things and the grandeur of those that are heavenly and divine.

VII

On Recollection.

By speaking the mind becomes dissipated and separated from God; silence, on the contrary, brings the mind back to God and unites it to him.

The more silence, the more innocence. I will keep silence when I see that my silence is worth more than what I want to say.

He who keeps his heart in a cloister, that is, shut up with God, keeps his heart from all disorder. Where there is none beside the heart and God, all goes well.

The movements of God in the soul are done very silently. A mind too much occupied with outward things, negligent and little attentive to itself, will not hear interior words, and will let them pass unnoticed. We must keep our mind recollected in order to listen to God and our heart free to follow his inspirations.

God busies himself about everyone of us as if he had no other to attend to: let us occupy ourselves with God as if there were no one else in the world but God.

In order to have God everywhere and always present to us and to unite ourselves to him, we must not only separate ourselves outwardly from creatures but also interiorly; we must make a solitude within ourselves in which our soul, wherever we may be or in whatever company, may remain enclosed.

VIII

On Peace of Soul.

Peace of soul is the capital point in the interior life and the foundation of the spiritual edifice which every true Christian wishes to erect within himself. By this peace of soul, this interior calm, we perfectly imitate God, whose happiness is never troubled by any happening. This is the precious pearl which we must buy at the cost of all we possess: the soul that has found it is richer than one which possesses the entire world. God and this happy state are all its treasure and all its life.

A soul that never resists the wishes or the movements of grace enjoys great interior repose. Our pains and troubles come from our resistance.

The more nearly the soul approaches to unity and simplicity in its operations, the more tranquil it is.

In our natural life, trouble begins with the senses and passes thence into the heart. In the spiritual life, peace begins with the heart and flows thence into the lower faculties.

IX

On Confidence in God.

We preach the fear of God to people in the world; for myself, I preach to religious and devout persons confidence in God. If this is useful to them at all times, it is especially so when they have fallen into some fault. I should wish that their confidence in God might be as great then as it is after Holy Communion. After a fault we have more need of confidence than before, because, being weaker, we have more need of support and strength, and confidence *is* our strength and our support.

We cannot vex the devil more than by rousing up our confidence in God after a fall. For what the devil then most desires is to keep us in a state of discouragement bordering on despair which is not merely a fault in itself, but the continuation of several faults.

To upset this plan of the devil, let us stir ourselves up to confidence, the greatest possible confidence.

Why should we get discouraged on the pretext that we often fall? Though he may be defeated a thousand times, does the devil ever get discouraged or cease to attack us every day? He hopes everything from his own malice and our weakness. Why should we hope less from the goodness of God and the help of his grace? They are infinitely more powerful than all the temptations of the devil.

Our confidence is never more perfectly exercised than when we are in the greatest danger or the greatest suffering.

The heart most perfectly abandoned to God is the one most perfectly guarded.

X

On Pure Love.

To love God purely to content him, because he desires that I should love him, and because he deserves to be loved. To love him without any thought of what we may gain by loving him, of what he can give us, or of what he has promised to those that love him; but like useless servants, immolated to his love.

Let him deprive me of everything except this pure love, I will be content and I ask him to do it. He will take from me nothing which I am not ready to lose with a good will for his love. In leaving me his pure love, he will leave me all I desire. I renounce with all my heart and for ever all my own interests, that they may be lost with me in pure love. If I love the immortality which God has promised me, it is so that I may for ever possess his pure love. I desire with all my heart from this moment to cease to exist rather than to be for one moment without his pure love.

Your pure love, my God, is everything to me and without it all else is nothing worth. It is my delight, my life, my bliss, my glory, my paradise, my eternity, because it is the only good I can bestow upon you, with the help of your grace, and which you ask of me.

As long as I seek myself in the least thing, pure love has not possession of my heart.

In as far as it is just that my being should be sacrificed to pay homage to the infinite being of God, so far also is it just that my self-love should be destroyed that the pure love of God may live in me.

I shall make progress in pure love as long as I separate myself from self-love; as I must put no limits to progress in pure love, so also must I separate myself an infinite distance from the love of myself.

The life of self-love is the death of pure love. The life of pure love is the death of self-love. They cannot exist side by side. All other love must be destroyed if we wish to obtain pure love.

Self-love is nourished by spiritual delights and consolations; pure love feeds on dryness, interior desolation and the cross.

Nothing from myself, nothing of myself, but all from God, and all in God.

One of the Blessed in his state of glory would be content were he in the smallest corner of the world, separated from paradise and the company of the rest of the Blessed. Why? Because he sees and possesses God. His heart cannot desire anything else but God, in comparison with whom everything else appears an atom.

In the same way a Blessed soul who occupies the lowest place in glory is perfectly content. He sees others who, being higher in glory, possess God in a more excellent manner than himself. But this knowledge excites no jealousy, nor lessens his happiness. He can only desire God and the accomplishment of the divine will. God is his all, the rest is nothing. This is the model for a soul which loves God with a pure and disinterested love.

We must not seek our rest in resting, but only in the will of God. This is to say, we must not amuse ourselves with desiring or seeking rest when we have it not; we must only fix ourselves in the will of God with entire indifference to labour or repose. Otherwise we are seeking ourselves, not purely God. This is an obstacle which often holds us back a long time, even our whole life, which hinders us from thoroughly renouncing ourselves and giving ourselves up wholly to be possessed by God.

We remain for ever within the bounds of our own will and the will of God, of nature and grace, of virtue and vice. We must lose ourselves entirely in God, give to grace entire empire over us, practise

virtue to its full extent and in all its purity in order to separate ourselves, as it were, infinitely from ourselves, from nature and from vice. Then we shall enter into a holy liberty, into a repose which nothing can disturb.

XI

On Resignation to the Will of God.

In your troubles, do not seek to quiet yourself by any other way than that of resignation and patience.

Resignation to the deprivation of temporal goods is worth more than their possession. The only exception to this is divine grace. The two most precious things in this world are to know how to pray and how to suffer: both these are contained in a third, which is to know how to be resigned.

Since we must always be resigned to quit this life at the time and in the manner that God shall please, we must also be disposed to all the other losses which may be required of us in this life; to the loss of wealth, of health, of reputation and honour, and to all sorts of infirmities and maladies, humiliations and calumnies. This resignation and disposition of mind are the only things we must never lose, and to preserve them we must be willing to sacrifice all the rest. In all the happenings of life, both those which actually occur and those which are merely present to our imagination, we must keep ourselves in the same resignation, the same abandonment to the orders of God.

XII

To Excite Fervour.

There are some souls that make everything little, because they do everything with a little heart, with a will that is constrained, narrow and cramped. There are others who make everything great: they do the tiniest actions with a great heart, with a noble, generous, limitless will. All that is done by little hearts is little; all that is done by great hearts is great.

To do a great action with a poor will is only to do a paltry thing: to do a small act with a great will is to do a great thing. What makes our actions great or small before God is the amount of good will with which we do them.

When the difficulty is greater than our will we give in. When our will is greater than the difficulty, we overcome. Now, if we choose, there will never be any difficulty which will not be less than our will. The reason of this is evident: there can present itself no difficulty which will not be less than the grace which God offers. Let us then accept all the grace he is willing to give and we shall then always have both grace and will greater than our difficulties; we shall in consequence overcome them all.

We ought to do and suffer the little things which occur with a heart as great, as noble, as lofty as if it were an occasion of suffering something really heroic for God, martyrdom, for instance.

If I can overcome myself, tame nature and temper, this victory will deliver me from sins, protect me from the pains which are their just penalty, and procure for me infinite blessings in time and eternity. Shall I be so ill-advised, so cowardly as to let slip so great an advantage, since the grace of God will never fail me?

What most enrages the devils is that they have lost such great blessings and drawn down on themselves such terrible evils purely by their own fault. When we cannot obtain things which depend on the will of another, we are vexed, we complain: but when I do not obtain from myself what depends on myself, and is of such great consequence to myself, is this not strange? All that we might obtain from others is nothing; their refusal can, if I will, give me a blessing worth incomparably more, no less than patience.

One reason why we advance so slowly in perfection is our continual interruptions. As soon as we have taken one step, instead of continuing in the same

path, we return to the old thoughts, feelings and passions from which we had a little withdrawn ourselves by our first effort; we linger there for a notable time till we make a second effort, after which we again return to our natural level. This fault is not noticed enough. The means of correcting it is watchfulness over ourselves, constantly putting from us every object the idea or love of which may hold us back. This vigilance will put us in that state in which we ought to be in order that God may do what he will with us.

XIII

To Encourage Fidelity.

Our fidelity to grace ought to be prompt, entire and constant.

The least word coming from one we love is sweet and well received. Is it not right that the least inspiration of God should be received by us with fidelity and a perfectly submissive heart?

He who does not do as much as he can does not deserve any grace to do more. God never takes from us his gifts unless we withdraw our heart from him.

We ought to shew exactitude and fidelity to God in regard of four things: (1) In regard to all that comes from God, his graces and his inspirations, in order to receive and obey them; (2) in regard to what is contrary to God, even the lightest sin, in order to avoid them; (3) in regard to what we ought to do for God, down to the smallest of our duties, the least important of our rules, in order to keep them; (4) in regard to occasions of suffering for God, in order to endure them for God.

We ask God that we may gain our law-suits, yet most often we make him lose his. For God has law-suits every day, of which we are the judges and arbitrators. The matter of these law-suits is the possession of our heart, which is disputed by his

enemies, the world, the devil and the flesh. He has right on his side, and he justly claims that both capital and interest belong to him. Daily, however, do we give judgement in favour of his enemies: we prefer the suggestions of the devil to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; we are weakly indulgent to the world, and we give ourselves up to our natural inclinations instead of holding firm to the rights of God.

XIV

On the Interior and Exterior Lives.

According to the Scripture, there are only two sorts of lives: the one interior, the other exterior; the one earthly, carnal and animal, the other spiritual, heavenly and divine. What makes the difference between these two kinds of life is the difference between the objects which occupy our mind and heart and which cause our joy or sorrow, our love or hatred.

The exterior life lowers and degrades a man to the level of the animals; the interior life ennobles a man and raises him up to God. Whoever lives the exterior life, be he even king or hero, is only a low and grovelling soul, whose sentiments never rise above the earth. A Christian who, instructed and formed by the Holy Spirit himself, has no eyes save to contemplate the eternal, who despises what is passing and perishable, whose heart is entirely occupied in loving God and the interests of his glory, is the type of a truly noble soul, a soul indeed great and lofty; a soul of whom the world is not worthy.

The interior life consists in correspondence with what is supernatural, with all God's inspirations, all the movements of grace, mingling nothing that is natural, no tincture of self-seeking.

Happy is he who knows how to give to the interior and natural life what cannot be denied it, and who plunges and loses himself in the interior and super-

natural life. He who makes a wise distinction between these two lives, sets little store by the advantages of the former; he gives all his esteem, all his affection and all his solicitude to the latter.

XV

On the Broad Way and the Narrow.

The way that leads to perdition and the gate leading to it are broad, said our Saviour. But when we have reached the end of this wide road, we enter forever into a narrow and obscure place, the centre of every evil: this is hell. To this misery we are led by honours, riches, momentary and passing pleasures.

On the contrary, the way which leads to life and the gate by which we enter are narrow. But when we have followed this strait path, when we have passed this narrow gate, we enter a country of immense extent, a land of light, of peace and of eternal delight: this is paradise. We reach this happiness by the renunciation of a few sensible pleasures which are short-lived and trifling, and by submission to the holy will of God.

The words of our Lord which we have just quoted are verified even in this life with regard to both sinners and the just.

The road which leads to sin is wide because in it we give full liberty to our senses and to nature.

The road which leads to perfection is narrow, because we can only enter it by mortifying our senses, doing violence to our natural inclinations and cutting off useless things.

But this broad path of indulging our senses leads to a state of constraint, obscurity and misery. It is the state of sin, in which the sinner groans, bound and mastered by his evil habits: it is like to hell.

On the contrary, by the narrow way of mortification we reach a place of vast extent, lightsome and entrancing. It is the state of perfection, in which

the soul, freed from the senses, strong and invincible against the attacks of its enemies, lives with God in the region of the spirit in a holy liberty, in abundance of true and solid blessings. This is to be in a paradise.